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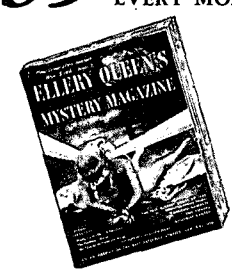


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**ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE**

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK, *Publisher* • ELLERY QUEEN, *Editor*

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# Solved by Ellery Queen!

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*"Confusion worse confounded."*
*— John Milton*

*Early this year we read five round-ups of the best detective-crime novels of 1949. All five were by recognized and accredited reviewers, three of whom have won the coveted "Edgar" awarded annually by the Mystery Writers of America to an outstanding critic in the mystery field. Our analysis of these five round-ups left us so critically confused, so pathetically punch-drunk, that we cannot refrain from giving you the facts.*

*As it happened, the five critics represented three major sections of the United States, and three of its largest cities. Two critics published their opinions in New York, two were syndicated out of Chicago, and one expressed his private-eye preferences from San Francisco. So, you can see, we did not stack the cards.*

*First, let us introduce these five arbiters of 'tec taste. Anthony Boucher, reviewer for EQMM and "The New York Times," selected what he called "the ten top [mystery] novels of 1949." Judge Lynch, writing in "The Saturday Review of Literature," went "back over the year's output and checked those books that particularly entertained him" — and he commented on 19 detective-crime-suspense novels published in 1949. Drexel Drake, the mystery authority for the "Chicago Sunday Tribune," decided that "a round ten get the nod into the circle as best mysteries of 1949." James Sandoe, from his regular column in the "Chicago Sun-Times," concluded that "the year's greatest single negative blessing was the diminution of quantity which saw (if only by this fact) a diminution of rubbish"; despite a generally pessimistic tone, Mr. Sandoe mentioned the largest number of books as worthy of critical comment — no less than 29. And Edward Dermot Doyle, of the "San Francisco Chronicle," nominated what he called the "Golden Dozen of 1949 . . . the 12 thrillers that pleased us most during the year just ended."*

*Now, here is the astounding, the absolutely incredible result of our analysis:*

*Not a single mystery novel published in 1949 was chosen as one of the best of the year by* all five *critics.*

*Please re-read that sentence. It is so amazing a fact that even now, after double-checking our comparisons of the five lists, we still can't believe it.*

*To put it another way, the five critics — acknowledged to be among the best in the country, if not in the world — did not agree unanimously on a single book as one of the best published in 1949. Not a single mystery novel, out of more than 200 published last year, received votes from all*



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*five critics — all of whom, we have every right to assume, read the same books.*

*And you haven't heard the worst.*

*It is a matter of incontrovertible statistics that not a single mystery novel published in 1949 received even four votes from the five critics.*

*Difference of opinion? Indeed! But remember the words of Voltaire: I do not agree with a word that you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it. . . . Although all five mystery critics did not agree on a single 1949 book, we are convinced that their individual nominations were completely sincere and that their differences of opinion were completely honest.*

*Nevertheless, we cannot help wondering: What price criticism?*

*Nor can we help feeling that the state of criminological criticism in this country is definitely insecure. How is it possible for five reputable and competent critics not to agree on a single book? It would be too much to expect all five critics (or even three, for that matter) to agree on the Number One mystery of the year; but surely it is not too much to expect all five critics to agree on* one *of the best of any year.*

*As you read these words, it is near the end of another year. In a few months mystery reviewers will again be selecting their "best of the year." We will feel that there is more solid ground under all of us if the "best mysteries of 1950" include at least one detective novel which all the important critics agree on . . .*

*We know no detective-story writer whose work has not been commended by some and condemned by others. Even Erle Stanley Gardner, for all his immense popularity, has suffered the slings and arrows of outrageous critical disagreement. Why, there has never even been any agreement on which of Gardner's many characters is his best. Of course, a multitude swear by Perry Mason. But we have heard others say that they prefer Ed Jenkins, the Phantom Crook — or Ken Corning, the slick lawyer who antedated Perry Mason — or Señor Lobo — or The Patent Leather Kid — or Sidney Zoom — or the firm of Small, Weston & Burke — or "Whispering Sands" — or Speed Dash, the human fly, who was ESG's very first series character — or Major Brane — or Black Barr, the avenger. (We will tell you more about these characters in future issues.) But the Gardner creation whose return to print has been most insistently demanded is without doubt Lester Leith, the Robin Hood of detectives who solved baffling mysteries in order to crack down on cracksmen. Here is the second in a series of novelettes about the legendary Lester, the light-fingered, lightning-witted Leith.*



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# LESTER LEITH, FINANCIER

*by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER*

IT WAS approximately two thirty in the afternoon, and Lester Leith, strolling idly along a backwash in the shopping district, was very frankly interested in a pair of straight-seamed silk stockings — not those which were in the hosiery display of the window to his right — but those which were very animatedly displayed on the legs of a short-skirted young woman some fifty feet in front of him.

In such matters Lester Leith was a connoisseur, but because his interest verged upon the abstract, he made no effort to shorten the distance. Leith liked to stroll and watch the panorama of life streaming past. A few seconds from now his interest might be claimed by a face which showed character, or some passing pedestrian might interest him. At the moment it was a shapely pair of legs.

Half a block away, a woman's head protruded from a fourth floor window. Above the sounds of traffic could be heard her shrill screams.

"Help! Police! *POLICE!!*"

Almost instantly a dark furry object was thrown from the window. For a half-second it fell as a compact ball; then the resistance of the air opened it out into what seemed to be a fur cape. This cape, like the proverbial young man on the flying trapeze, sailed through the air with the greatest of ease, to come to rest finally upon a metallic crosspiece which supported a street sign four stories below.

At his right, Lester Leith heard cynical laughter, and his eyes, seeking the source of merriment, encountered the grinning face on one of those cocksure individuals who is never at a loss to explain the significance of anything that has happened.

"Advertising stunt," the man said, catching Leith's eye. "That's a fur company up there. Just throwing fur capes away. Get it? They've hatched up something which will give 'em a lot of newspaper publicity."

Leith heard the sound of a police whistle and the pound of authoritative feet as the traffic officer from the corner came down the sidewalk.

For reasons of his own, Leith preferred to avoid contact with police officers who were rushing to the scene of a crime. His methods were far too subtle and delicately balanced to invite risk by blundering into some police dragnet.

"Thanks for the tip," he said to the omniscient stranger. "I was just about to fall for it. As it is, I won't be late for my appointment."

And Leith deliberately turned his

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back upon the scene of excited confusion.

Lester Leith, slender and debonair in his full-dress evening clothes, stood in the lobby of the theater at the end of the first act and debated whether to wait and see the rest of the show.

The usual opening night audience of celebrities, sophisticates, and the social uppercrust either promenaded around the lobby or formed in little clusters where they engaged in low-voiced conversations.

Many a feminine eye, drifting in the direction of the straight-shouldered, slim-hipped young man, registered approval, but Lester Leith was, for the moment, engrossed in the problem which had been gnawing at the back of his consciousness all evening. Why should a young woman trying on a silver fox cape in a furrier's on the fourth floor of a loft building abruptly toss the cape out of the window, nonchalantly pay the purchase price in cash, and leave the premises, apparently seeing nothing unusual in the incident?

Melodious chimes announced that the show would resume in exactly two minutes. People began pinching out cigarettes and drifting through the curtained doorways to the rows of seats. Lester Leith still hesitated.

The show, he was forced to admit, was better than average, but his mind simply refused to let the entertainment on the stage exclude from his consideration the mysterious young woman who had so casually tossed a valuable fur cape out of a four-story window.

Lester Leith inserted his thumb and forefinger in the pocket of his waistcoat and removed the folded clipping which he had taken from the evening paper. Despite the fact that he knew it almost by heart, he read it once more.

> Pedestrians on Beacon Street were startled this afternoon by the screams of a young woman who leaned from a window of the Gilbert Furrier Company in the Cooperative Loft Building four stories above the sidewalk calling for the police. Looking up, they saw a silver fox cape come plummeting toward the sidewalk. The cape spread out, caught the breeze, and finally fell across a rod supporting the sign of the Nelson Optical Company, where it lodged just out of reach of the clutching fingers of dozens of eager feminine shoppers. The screaming woman was later identified as Miss Fanny Gillmeyer, 321 East Grove Street, an employee of the furrier company.
>
> Officer James C. Haggerty, on duty at the intersection, left his post to rush with drawn revolver into the Loft building, commandeering an elevator which rushed him up to the fourth floor. As the officer came running down the corridor, he was greeted by F. G. Gilbert, head of the Gilbert Furrier Company, who explained that the screamed alarm had been a mistake.
>
> Officer Haggerty insisted upon an investigation which disclosed that a young woman customer, whose name the company refused to divulge, had been trying on silver fox capes. Abruptly, she had said, "I'll take this one," wadded it into a roll, and tossed it out of the window. Miss Gillmeyer, the clerk who had been making the sale, thinking that she was encountering a new form of shoplifting, promptly proceeded to shout for police.

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By the time Mr. Gilbert, the proprietor, appeared upon the scene, the customer was quite calmly counting out bills to the amount of the purchase price. She offered no explanation as to why she had thrown the cape out of the window, and quite casually left instructions covering the delivery of the cape when it was recovered. During the confusion which ensued just prior to the arrival of Officer Haggerty, the young woman, who was described as a dazzlingly beautiful blonde some twenty-five years of age, left the building.

Officer Haggerty was inclined to believe the young woman was an actress who was intent upon getting publicity. If this was true, her desire was foiled by the refusal of the furrier company to divulge her name and address. The cape was subsequently retrieved, and, after being cleaned, presumably delivered by the Gilbert Furrier Company to the eccentric purchaser.

The dimming lights announced that the second act of the play was about to start. Lester Leith, returning the clipping to his pocket, reached a decision and turned toward the street. A waiting taxi took him to the Cooperative Loft Building on Beacon Street.

There was nothing about the appearance of the Cooperative Loft Building which offered a clue to the strange behavior of the purchaser of the fur cape. The Gilbert Furrier Company occupied the entire fourth floor. The window from which the fur cape had been thrown was evidently the one directly over the sign of the Nelson Optical Company.

Leith noticed, on the opposite side of the street, two men who were quite evidently waiting for some event which they felt would take place in the not too distant future.

The manner in which they "loafed" on opposite sides of the entrance of the Rust Commercial Building, directly across the street from the Cooperative Loft Building — the manner in which they completely ignored each other, yet managed to turn their heads in unison whenever the sound of a clanging elevator door came from the lobby of the office building — indicated a certain common purpose. Moreover, whenever one of the belated office workers left the building, these men converged upon the doorway, only to move casually away again as soon as they got a good look.

Leith got back in his cab, said to the driver, "We'll wait here."

The cabbie smiled knowingly. "Want the radio on?" he asked.

Leith said, "No, thanks," and settled back to a cigarette and a period of watchful waiting which was terminated after about twenty minutes when a slimly youthful woman in a blue skirt and jacket, wearing a rakish, tight-fitting hat perched at an angle over her right ear, walked out from the elevators across the lobby to the entrance, her trim, smooth-swinging legs carrying her at a rapid pace.

The two watchers swung once more toward the door. This time they didn't veer apart. As the young woman stepped out, each man possessed himself of an elbow. They hurried her across the sidewalk into a car which had mysteriously appeared from nowhere and slid to a quick stop

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just in time for the young woman to be catapulted into the interior.

Lester Leith pinched out his cigarette and said to the cabbie, "We'll follow that car."

The cab driver made a quick U-turn which placed him behind his quarry, and a red traffic signal enabled him to slide up into an advantageous position.

"No rough stuff?" he asked dubiously.

"Certainly not," Leith said. "Just a matter of curiosity."

The cab driver studied the license plate of the car ahead. "It ain't the law, is it?"

Leith said, "That is precisely what I am endeavoring to ascertain at the moment."

The cab driver seemed not too enthusiastic, but he competently followed the other machine until it came to a stop in front of a downtown office building. His expert eye appraised the trio who emerged. "They're G-men," he said.

"I doubt it," Lester Leith commented. "The obviousness of their methods, their desire for mutual support, and their complete lack of subtlety are more indicative of police officers of the old school. My personal opinion is they're operatives from a private detective agency."

The cab driver looked at him with sudden respect. "Say," he said, "I bet you're a G-man yourself."

"With whom," Lester Leith asked, "did you bet?"

The cab driver grinned. "Myself."

Leith said solemnly, "That's a break for you. You can't lose."

Edward H. Beaver served Lester Leith in the capacity of valet, but his obsequious loyalty was a carefully assumed mask covering his true character.

For some time police had suspected Lester Leith of being a unique super-detective — a man whose keen mind unraveled tangled threads in the skein of crime. But all those crimes to which Lester Leith devoted his attention had one peculiar and uniform denouement. When the police, following a sometimes devious but always accurate trail blazed for them by Leith's activities, reached their objectives, they invariably found a somewhat dazed criminal completely stripped of his ill-gotten gains.

It was because of this the police had "planted" an undercover man to act as Leith's valet. Yet, much as the police wanted to catch Leith red-handed, so far the spy's activities had been no more productive of results than the efforts of those committees selected from an audience to supervise a stage magician in his feats of legerdemain.

The spy was waiting up when Leith fitted his latchkey to the door of the penthouse apartment.

"Good evening, sir."

"What, Scuttle, waiting up?"

"Yes, sir. I thought perhaps you'd like a Scotch and soda, sir. I have the things all ready. Your coat? Your hat? Your stick? Your gloves? Yes, sir. Now, do you wish to put on your

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dressing gown and house slippers?"

Leith said, "No. I think I'll remain dressed for a while, Scuttle. You might bring me the Scotch and soda."

Leith stretched out on the chaise longue and thoughtfully sipped the drink which the spy had placed at his elbow, while Beaver hovered around Lester Leith's chair.

"Scuttle," Leith said at length, "you make it a point to read the crime news, I believe?"

The spy coughed apologetically. "You'll pardon me for saying so, but ever since you outlined your theory that the newspaper accounts frequently contain some significant fact which points to the criminal, I've made it a habit to read the crime news. Sort of a mental game I play with myself."

Lester Leith waited until he had taken two more leisurely sips from his glass before saying, "A fascinating pastime, isn't it, Scuttle?"

"Yes, sir."

"But make certain that your solutions are always merely academic — that you keep them only in your mind. You know how Sergeant Ackley is, Scuttle — over-zealous, unreasonable — and he has that inherent suspicion which is the unfailing indication of the prejudiced mind."

Leith yawned, and patted back the yawn with polite fingers. "Scuttle, in your crime reading, have you perhaps run across an account of some crime which took place in the Rust Commercial Building?"

"The Rust Commercial Building? No, sir. I can't say that I have."

Leith said, "I notice, Scuttle, that on the sixth floor of the Rust Commercial Building is a whole string of offices occupied by the Precision Instrument Designing and Installation Company, more generally referred to, I believe, as *Pidico*. Have you heard of any crime which has been committed there?"

"No, sir, I haven't."

Leith stretched, yawned, and said, "Most annoying, Scuttle."

"What is, may I ask?"

"To depend upon the newspapers for information — to know that something in which you are interested has happened, and that it will be twelve to twenty-four hours before you can read about it."

Beaver kept his surprise concealed behind a rigidly immobile poker countenance. His eyes held burning curiosity, but his manner was merely deferential as he said, "Is there anything that I could do to help you, sir?"

Lester Leith gave frowning consideration to the spy's overtures. "Scuttle, could I trust you?"

"With your very life, sir."

"All right, Scuttle, I'll give you an assignment — a very confidential one. . . . In the Channing Commercial Building there's a private detective agency. I didn't bother to look it up. Some men took a young woman there about ten o'clock tonight. They questioned her. Perhaps they turned her loose, perhaps not. If my reasoning is correct, she was an employee of the

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Precision Instrument Designing and Installation Company. Find out if that is the case. If so, report to me her name and address. If the facts aren't as I've outlined them, then I'm not interested in the matter at all."

"Yes, sir. And if it turns out you're right, sir, may I ask the nature and extent of your interest?"

Leith said, "Simply to put my mind at ease by making a logical explanation of an event which has puzzled me."

"May I ask what the event was?"

"The throwing of a silver fox cape out of a four-story window."

The spy's eyes glittered. "Oh, yes sir. I read about *that* in the paper."

"Indeed, Scuttle? Did you have any theories about it?"

"Yes, sir. I gave that matter quite a bit of thought and reached a very satisfactory conclusion. I said to myself — if you won't think it's presumptuous, sir — I'll pretend that I'm Lester Leith reading that newspaper clipping, and try to find in it the significant clue which the police have overlooked."

"And what did you conclude?"

"That the woman was merely a cog in a machine, a part of a very clever scheme."

"Scuttle, you amaze me!"

"Yes, sir. I decided that her sole function was to distract the attention of everyone in the place while a clever confederate worked a foolproof scheme."

"What was the scheme, Scuttle?"

"Switching price tags, sir."

"Can you give me a few more details?"

"Yes, sir. Some coats are second-grade or imitation, and valued at seventy-five to a hundred dollars. Others are the real thing and valued at from twelve hundred to twenty-five hundred. Obviously, a person who could switch price tags would be able to take advantage of the situation, and for a relatively small amount get a high-priced coat."

Lester Leith said, "Marvelous, Scuttle! You're doing splendidly."

"Thank you, sir. And do you think that's what happened?"

"Certainly not, but you're improving, Scuttle."

"You mean you don't think that happened?"

"No, Scuttle."

"But it's an entirely logical explanation," the valet insisted.

Leith yawned again. "That's why I don't think it happened, Scuttle, and now I think I'll go to bed. Don't call me before nine in the morning."

Incandescent lights blazed down on the cigarette-charred desk of Sergeant Ackley. The air in the building held that peculiar stench which comes to jails, police headquarters, and other places which are inhabited twenty-four hours a day. Beaver sat across the desk from Sergeant Ackley and said, "I just called on the off-chance you hadn't gone to bed."

Ackley yawned, ran his fingers through his hair, and said, "That's all right, Beaver. I'd get up in the middle

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of the night to catch this crook. You say you need this information before nine o'clock in the morning?"

"That's right."

Ackley pressed a button, and when an officer appeared, said, "Find out what detective agency is in the Channing Commercial Building and get the guy in charge on the line."

When the officer had left the room, Ackley rubbed his hand around the back of his neck, yawned, then fished in his waistcoat pocket for a cigar. "And you think it's connected up with this goofy shoplifting stunt at the Gilbert place?"

"It seems to be," Beaver said.

Sergeant Ackley lit his cigar, puffed thoughtfully for a few moments, then shook his head emphatically, and said, "Nope, Beaver. That's a blind. That business at the furrier company was a price tag switch, just the way you doped it out. My guess is, Gilbert will be squawking his head off tomorrow that someone walked out with a two-thousand-dollar mink coat by making the pay-off for a seventy-five dollar rabbit imitation."

Beaver nodded his head. "That was what *I* thought. Leith thinks different."

Sergeant Ackley said, "That's just the line of hooey he's giving you to keep you from knowing what he really had in mind."

"He's fallen for me this time, Sergeant. He's really going to take me into his confidence."

Sergeant Ackley rolled the cigar around to the other corner of his mouth. "Nope," he said, "he's playing you for a sucker, Beaver. That business about the silver fox cape is proof that he's stringing you along. I'll bet there wasn't anything that happened over in the Instrument —"

He broke off as the phone rang.

Sergeant Ackley scooped up the receiver, and said out of the corner of his mouth, "Hello — Sergeant Ackley talking."

There was a moment's silence in the room, then Ackley pulled the cigar out of his mouth, and said, in a voice suddenly crisp with authority, "Oh, this is the Planetary International Detective Service in the Channing Commercial Building, is it? And *you're* in charge? Okay. This is Sergeant Ackley at headquarters. Now get this, and get it straight because I don't want any fumbling. Have you got a client, the Precision Instrument Designing and Installation Company? Oh, you have, eh? I see. Now, what kind of work are you doing right now for that company? I don't care whether it's confidential or not! This is police headquarters. We're working on a case, and we think that angle enters into it . . . Never mind how we knew about it. We're asking for information . . . No, you aren't going to stall along while you call up your client. I'm asking for information, and I want it. We let you guys get by with a lot of stuff, but right now . . . Well, that's better. Okay, go ahead and shoot."

There was almost three minutes of complete silence while Sergeant Ack-

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ey scowled at the telephone transnitter, listening to the voice which ›oured words through the receiver nto his attentive left ear. Then Ser;eant Ackley said, "How do you know his dame is the one? . . . I see . . . Where is she now? . . . All right, rou guys should have reported that n the first place. That's a crime. That's burglary . . . Sure, they lon't want any notoriety, but they lon't need to have it. We can keep hings under cover the same as any›ne else. Do you eggs up there think rou can do better work than the ›olice department? . . . Well, that's ›etter. Tell him the truth. Tell him ieadquarters called up about it and lemanded a report. Tell him we're on ›ur toes enough so we know about :rimes even when the victims try to :eep 'em secret, and you can tell him hat Sergeant Ackley is working on he case personally. Tell him I've nade substantial progress toward a olution. In the meantime, you eggs :eep us posted, see? . . . That's ight, Sergeant Ackley."

Ackley banged down the receiver nd then grinned across the desk at the ndercover man. "The chief's gonna ;et a kick out of that," he said. "They vere trying to keep it secret. That ›ird up at the detective agency nearly ainted, wonderin' how we knew bout it."

"How we knew about what?" 3eaver asked.

Ackley said, "An inventor by the ıame of Nicholas Hodge worked out n improved submarine detector and locator. He made a rough model which seemed to do the work. He took it up with Washington and the thing got snowed under with red tape. Then he made a contact with one of the rear admirals who arranged for a definite test but insisted that a completely finished instrument be installed for the test, one that looked good enough to impress the big shots in the Navy. The Precision Instrument Designing and Installation Company was picked for the job.

"Naturally, the thing was carried out in great secrecy. Jason Bellview, the president of the company, and his confidential secretary, a girl by the name of Bernice Lamen, were the only ones who knew what it was all about, and where the master blueprints were kept. Those offices of the instrument company are just the designing offices — the factory is about a mile out of town. Bellview's idea was that he'd split the thing up into parts, have workmen make the separate parts, and then, at the last minute, Bellview, using a pair of trusted assistants, would assemble them himself."

"And something happened to the blueprints?" Beaver asked.

"Vanished into thin air."

"This detective agency is working on it?"

"That's right. They're under contract to take care of all the Instrument Company's business. Bellview called them as soon as he knew what had happened. They suspected Bernice Lamen, laid some sort of a trap for

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her, and she walked into it. They nabbed her, and are giving her a third degree and getting no place with it."

"So we take over?" Beaver grinned.

Sergeant Ackley grinned. "We take over," he said, "but not until old Jason Bellview comes crawling in on his belly and begs us to. He was afraid of the publicity. If it ever gets out that those blueprints aren't in his office, or if he can't guarantee that while they were out of his possession no one made copies of them, the Precision Instrument Company is in one sweet mess."

Abruptly the grin left Beaver's face. He frowned thoughtfully.

"Well," Ackley asked, "what is it?"

Beaver said, "How the devil did Lester Leith know all about this?"

Ackley's eyes reflected the mental jolt this question gave him.

Beaver said, "It was something that had to do with pitching that silver fox cape out of that window."

"Nonsense, Beaver. That's just a blind he's using."

Beaver said suddenly, "Look here, Sergeant, the Instrument Company's offices are right across the street from the fur company. Do you suppose you could see into the —"

Sergeant Ackley shook his head authoritatively. "The Instrument Company is on the sixth floor. The furrier's on the fourth."

Beaver said doggedly, "Well, the furrier's in a loft building, and the fourth floor of that building might be on a level with the sixth floor of the office building."

Sergeant Ackley's eyebrows leveled. "You may have something there," he admitted. Then he added hastily, "But I doubt it."

Lester Leith, over a breakfast of coffee, toast, and crisp bacon, listened to the valet's report.

"Very interesting, Scuttle, and I should say, quite complete. How did you get your facts?"

The spy coughed. "A young woman in whom I'm interested is keeping company with a police detective," he said.

"Oh, that's right. You've mentioned that before. I'm not certain that I approve the ethical aspects of the situation, Scuttle, but the relationship seems to have been signally productive of information."

"Yes, sir."

"And you're quite certain that Jason Bellview consulted the police?"

"Yes, sir. After midnight."

"Let's run over the story once more, Scuttle."

"Yes, sir. Bellview placed the master blueprints in his vault. The big door is kept open during the day, but is closed and locked at night. Nicholas Hodge, the inventor of the device, and Bellview had just finished a preliminary conference. The blueprints had been placed in the vault. Bellview had an important matter to attend to, and excused himself for a few moments, leaving Hodge waiting in an office which adjoined his private office. Bernice Lamen, Bellview's secretary, had opened and sorted the

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early afternoon mail in her own office and was just bringing it to Mr. Bellview's private office — so she said. She had just entered the office when she heard the screaming from across the street. Naturally, many of the employees ran to the windows to look out. Bernice Lamen says she heard the door slam in the private office — the exit door — as though someone had hurriedly run out. She assumed at the moment it was Mr. Bellview. That's what she says."

"It wasn't Bellview?"

"No, sir. Mr. Bellview says he was in another part of the building. Whoever it was, got the plans out of the vault. He seemed to know just where to go for them."

"Any chance someone entered the offices from the outside?"

"No, sir. Frank Packerson, who has charge of the firm's house organ, had been trap-shooting over the weekend. He'd brought his gun to the office, and, as soon as he heard the commotion across the street, he grabbed his gun, loaded it, and jumped out into the corridor. Hodge, the inventor, was the only man who appeared who wasn't connected with the company. And, of course, Hodge would hardly steal his own blueprints."

Lester Leith frowned thoughtfully. "How about Bernice Lamen?"

"The detectives watched the building last night. Miss Lamen returned to the offices. She said she was behind in her work. The detectives regarded that as being highly suspicious, so they nabbed her. You see, sir, a guard was instantly placed at the door to see that no one took the blueprints *out*. They must be still concealed in the offices. The thief removed them from the safe and hid them."

Leith said, "The detectives searched Miss Lamen and found nothing?"

"No, sir."

Leith smiled.

"You're planning to do something about it, sir?" Beaver asked.

Leith raised his eyebrows in surprise. "*Do* something?"

"Well, sir, that is, I was wondering if you had any more theories you wanted to check."

"I think not, Scuttle. I find myself irritated by the stupidity with which the police have handled the entire matter, but there's no call for me to *do* anything. My interest in these matters, Scuttle, is purely abstract — merely an academic speculation."

The woman who ran the theatrical employment agency looked up at Lester Leith. At first, her smile was merely a professional blandishment, but as her eyes took in the well-knit figure, the keen alert eyes, the straight nose and smiling lips, her manner suddenly became more personal.

"*Good* morning," she said, in a tone which had far more cordiality than was customarily given to unknown visitors.

Lester Leith smiled down at her. "I would like to write stories," he said.

The smile struggled against a frown and lost. "There's absolutely no open-

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ing for writers," she said. "We don't handle literary stuff ourselves, but unless you've had some experience —"

"Feature writing," Lester Leith went on, "writing from an unusual angle — the human interest behind the news."

The frown faded somewhat. "It sounds quite interesting, but I'm afraid we couldn't —"

"Oh," Leith interposed airily, "it's just a hobby. I don't care to make any money out of it, and I'm not asking you to place my work."

"What did you want then?"

"An actress who would not be adverse to publicity."

The woman at the desk said, "None of them are adverse to publicity."

"I want an actress," Leith said, "who has what it takes, a trouper, a —"

"You won't find those any more," the woman interrupted wearily. "Young people these days think only in terms of Hollywood. They regard the stage only as a springboard to help them jump into the movies."

Lester Leith said, "My actress doesn't necessarily need to be youthful. I want someone who has character and that something which is known as being a good sport."

She regarded him somewhat quizzically. "There's one waiting in the outer office," she said, "who has done everything from stock companies to vaudeville. She really has talent, but — well, she isn't young any more."

"How old?" Leith asked.

She smiled. "She says thirty, and looks thirty-three. I would say she was around forty. I have to admire her for the way she keeps up her courage."

"What's her name?"

"Winnie Gail."

"Would she be interested in doing a job for me — as a model?"

"I don't think so. She wants to be an actress or nothing, but you can talk with her."

Leith said, "Let's get her in."

Winnie Gail proved to be a woman who was impatient of subterfuges and wanted to know exactly where she stood. She interrupted Lester Leith's preliminary talk with a curt question. "Have you ever done any writing?"

"No," Lester Leith said. "This is a new venture."

She said impatiently, "Listen, you haven't the chance of the proverbial snowball."

Lester Leith said, "Tut, tut. I was afraid of that. Don't go, Miss Gail."

"Why not?"

"Fortunately, I am not dependent on my writing as a source of income."

"Well, I'm dependent on my time as a source of income, and I haven't any to waste."

Leith said, "I want you to pose for photographs and a story with a human interest slant. The compensation would be two hundred and fifty dollars for two hours' work — plus, of course, a fur coat."

"Plus a what?"

"A fur coat — a silver fox cape."

Winnie Gail abruptly sat down.

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"Now listen," she said, "is this on the up-and-up?"

Leith nodded.

"You're not wrapping a proposition in a cellophane package?"

He shook his head.

"I get this dough in cash?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Now."

"What do I have to do?"

"Throw a fur cape out of a window, and then tell me exactly how you felt when you did it."

Winnie Gail glanced at the startled woman behind the desk, then looked up at Lester Leith. "You're crazy," she said. "But if you have two hundred and fifty dollars in cash on you, I'm with you."

Lester Leith opened his wallet, counted out five fifty-dollar bills. As the currency fluttered to the desk of the woman who ran the theatrical employment agency, Winnie Gail said softly, "I haven't seen confetti like that since I played *Mother Was a Lady* in the old Pelman House."

F. G. Gilbert, head of the Gilbert Furrier Company, regarded Lester Leith with coldly calculating eyes.

"So you see," Leith explained affably, indicating the photographer who stood on his left, a big studio type camera in a carrying case and a tripod over his shoulder, "I've brought my photographer to make a series of pictures; and" — indicating Winnie Gail who wore her made-over, somewhat shabby clothes with an air of distinction — "I've brought my own customer. I will, of course, buy the silver fox cape at retail prices."

Gilbert shook his head.

"Of course," Lester Leith went on affably, "Miss Gail is an actress. Just between you and me, she expects to get considerable publicity out of this, and, as far as you're concerned — well, having the Gilbert Furrier Company mentioned prominently in connection with news and magazine stories, shouldn't do you any harm."

Gilbert frowned through his glasses. "You aren't a newspaper reporter?"

"No."

"A press agent?"

"Well, in a way. I have Miss Gail's publicity at heart."

Gilbert's appraisal of Miss Gail spoke volumes. "I'm not certain this store desires that sort of publicity."

Leith shrugged his shoulders. "As you wish," he said. "Of course, there's the purchase of a silver fox cape."

Gilbert said, "Just a minute. I'll have to confer with my advertising manager. I'll be right back."

He stepped into his private office and called police headquarters. "A man by the name of Lester Leith," he said, "claims to be a feature writer. He's here with an actress who wants to pitch another silver fox cape out of the window, and, at the same time, have Miss Fanny Gillmeyer, who was the clerk who screamed for the police yesterday, do the same thing all over again today. Is there any objection to my kicking him downstairs?"

The desk sergeant said, "Hold the

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phone. I'll put you in touch with Sergeant Ackley."

A moment later, Sergeant Ackley came on the wire, and Gilbert explained the matter in detail.

Ackley's voice was eager. "Any objections? Listen, don't let him change his mind. Stall him along for fifteen minutes. That's all I want — fifteen minutes."

"And it's okay after that?" Gilbert asked dubiously.

"Is it okay!" Sergeant Ackley exclaimed. "You listen to me. If you let this opportunity slip through your fingers, I'll — I'll — I'll close your joint up for handling stolen goods!"

Gilbert returned to the outer office. "Okay," he said, "but if you want Miss Gillmeyer to wait on you personally, it'll take a few minutes, because she's busy with another customer. However, I suppose you'll want to set up your cameras and do a little rehearsing?"

Lester Leith took charge of operations with that meticulous attention to detail which characterizes the highest-priced directors in the picture business.

"You see," Leith explained, "yesterday, the fox cape hit on the support of a sign and didn't get to the sidewalk; but that was only because an element of chance entered into the situation. Today, undoubtedly the cape will reach the sidewalk. Now, then, what will happen? Will someone pick it up and hurry away with it, or will the person who finds it be honest and return it? In any event, we want a whole series of action photographs."

The photographer set up the big studio camera, placed a speed graphic on the floor where it would be within easy reach. He also placed another speed camera on a smaller tripod. "Now listen," he said to Leith, "when the action starts, I've got to work fast. Be sure people keep out of my way."

Lester Leith nodded.

Gilbert looked at his watch, then motioned to the young woman who was standing nearby. "All right, Miss Gillmeyer," he said, "come on over here. You can go ahead any time now," he said to Lester Leith.

But nearly ten minutes elapsed before Leith indicated that he was ready.

Abruptly, Lester Leith said, "All right, go ahead."

Winnie Gail walked over to the window, hesitated a moment, then tossed out a silver fox cape. Fanny Gillmeyer thrust her head out of the window and screamed for police. Pedestrians on the street below stared up in frozen-faced curiosity. Across the street, the office workers in the Rust Commercial Building paused in whatever they were doing to stare. The photographer jumped from one camera to the other, then snatched up the speed graphic, leaned out of the window, and started shooting a series of pictures. . . .

Sergeant Ackley sat in conference with Captain Carmichael at police headquarters. A pile of photographs was on the desk.

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"He doesn't know you've got these pictures?" Carmichael asked.

Sergeant Ackley shook his head. "I put the screws on the photographers."

Captain Carmichael picked up the photographs, studied them thoughtfully. He opened a drawer in his desk, took out a magnifying glass, and moved it over one of the pictures. "Interesting," he said.

"You got something?" Sergeant Ackley inquired eagerly, walking around to peer over Captain Carmichael's shoulder.

The police captain tapped a portion of the photograph. "Notice," he said, "you can actually identify the people who are at the windows of the Precision Instrument offices. You can even see what's going on back in the offices themselves. There's a woman standing in front of the vault door."

"That's our own plant," Sergeant Ackley said. "Believe me, she's on the job. As soon as she heard the alarm, she didn't even look to see what it was. She just beat it for the safe, and stood there keeping guard. That's Ann Sherman, and they don't slip anything over on *her!*"

Captain Carmichael rubbed his hand thoughtfully over the top of his head. "I wonder," he said musingly, "if that spoiled things for Leith."

"How do you mean?"

"He hadn't counted on the woman who took Bernice Lamen's place being from headquarters. Perhaps he was hoping the vault would be unguarded, just as it was for a few moments yesterday."

"But the blueprints have already been swiped," Sergeant Ackley said. "What good would it do to give somebody the opportunity to steal them again?"

Captain Carmichael pursed his lips, puffed out his cheeks, and blew thoughtfully. Slowly his eyebrows crept together in a portentous scowl. "Sergeant," he said, "that's exactly what he wanted, and Ann Sherman being on the job, kept him from getting results. Hang it, we should have thought of that!

"Don't you see? Whoever stole those blueprints hasn't been able to get them out of the building. They are still there, hidden somewhere. The thief has memorized them enough to know the real secret of the device. Now he'd like to get them *back into the vault.*"

"I don't see why."

Captain Carmichael said patiently, "Because every inch of those offices was searched by the police, immediately after Jason Bellview got in touch with you. We didn't get to first base. Tell Jason Bellview to apologize to Bernice Lamen and get her back on the job; then give Lester Leith a free hand."

"What do you mean by a free hand?"

"Exactly what I said. Have you ever seen the Chinese method of catching fish, Sergeant?"

The exasperated Sergeant Ackley said sarcastically, "That's another thing I've overlooked in connection with the case, and I've completely

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overlooked inspecting the hairs on the head of the last Egyptian mummy through a microscope."

Captain Carmichael flushed. "Don't be so irritable," he growled, " and so blamed ignorant. I was going to tell you that the oriental method of catching fish is to put a rope around the neck of the fish-eating bird, so he can't swallow. The bird drops into the sea and grabs half a dozen fish. He can't swallow 'em, so he comes back to the surface, and the wily Chinese has half a dozen nice live fish, caught without any effort on his part."

Sergeant Ackley's eyes glistened. "What's the name of that bird?" he asked.

Captain Carmichael frowned. "I think they call it a cormorant."

Sergeant Ackley said, "Cripes, I'd like to have one of those birds to take up to the lake where I spend my summer vacation! There were fish there that just wouldn't bite —"

"We're talking about blueprints," Captain Carmichael interrupted. "Lester Leith is going to be our cormorant. He'll get the swag for us and then have to disgorge it."

"What the heck does a cormorant look like?" Sergeant Ackley asked.

Captain Carmichael said vaguely, "He's something like a pelican."

Sergeant Ackley pushed back his chair. "Well, I get the idea all right. We'll make this guy Leith something like a pelican."

Captain Carmichael gave one last warning. "Be absolutely certain," he said, "that you keep a rope tied around his neck. That's the most important thing in the way the Chinese fish. Otherwise, the birds would swallow everything they get."

Sergeant Ackley said confidently, "Leave it to me, Captain," and left the room. He was back, however, within a few seconds. "Say, Captain, don't think I'm cuckoo, but where could a man buy one of those birds that are like a pelican?"

Captain Carmichael fixed him with a stern eye. "In China," he said.

Lester Leith pressed the button of Apartment 7-B. The card opposite the button bore the names of two persons: Bernice Lamen, who was the confidential secretary of Jason Bellview, and Millie Foster.

After a moment the buzzer sounded, and Lester Leith walked up two flights of stairs to the apartment he wanted. The young woman who answered his knock was cool, collected, and very much on her guard. "What do you want?" she asked.

"I'd like to talk with Miss Bernice Lamen."

"Miss Lamen is not at home."

Lester Leith's eyes softened into twinkling appraisal of the stern young woman on the threshold. "You," he asked, "are Miss Foster?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps I can talk with you."

For a moment she studied him, then relaxed somewhat the severity of her manner, and repeated, "What do you want?"

"I take it, because you're sharing

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an apartment with Miss Lamen, that your relationship is a friendly one?"

"Yes. We're friends — have been for years."

Leith said, "I'm a writer."

There was alarm in her voice. "A newspaper man?"

"No, no! I'm just a beginner. It's something of a hobby with me."

"I see," she said dubiously.

Leith said affably, "Your friend has been placed in a most unsatisfactory position."

"In what way?"

"If I were she, I'd want to prove myself innocent."

"How?"

Leith's voice showed surprise. "Why, by seeing that the guilty person was trapped, of course."

For a long moment the woman in the doorway hesitated; then her face softened in a smile. "Oh, come on in," she said impulsively. "I'm Bernice Lamen. This is Millicent over here by the window. Miss Foster, this is Mr. — What did you say your name was?"

"Leith. Lester Leith."

"Well, come on in and sit down."

As Leith settled himself in the chair she had indicated, she sized up the expensive tailor-made suit he was wearing, and said, "You don't look like a poor writer."

"I'm not," Leith said. "I'm a good writer."

Millicent said hastily, "Bernice didn't mean —"

Bernice interrupted, "Skip it. He's kidding." She smiled at Lester Leith. "You don't look like any sort of a writer, good, bad, or indifferent. What's your game?"

"To find out who stole those blueprints."

Millicent said, "I understand someone threw another fur out of the window this afternoon."

"I did," Leith announced calmly.

"You did!" Bernice exclaimed.

Leith smiled deprecatingly. "It was, of course, the obvious thing to do."

Bernice glanced at Millicent, then leaned forward to regard Lester Leith from under level brows. "Now, let's get this straight. You mean *you* threw a fur cape out of the window again this afternoon?"

"Oh, I didn't do it myself," Leith said. "I engaged a young woman to do it, a very talented actress. You see, I wanted to have her give me an exclusive interview, telling me how it felt to throw an expensive fur cape out a four-story window."

Again the young women exchanged glances. Bernice Lamen, her tone perceptibly cooler, said, "Well, I'm afraid I can't do anything to help you."

Leith opened the small brief-case he was carrying, took out some photographs, and said, "These are a series of photographs which we took, showing the entire episode. Most interesting, don't you think?"

After a moment's hesitation, the two young women moved closer to study the photographs. Leith took a magnifying glass from his pocket, and said, "You can see a great many details here. Look at this picture of the

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crowd leaning out of the window over at the Precision Instrument Designing and Installation Company. I daresay you can recognize many of your fellow workers, Miss Lamen?"

"I should say I can, even without the glass. Why, there's —"

Leith interrupted her to indicate one of the windows with the point of his lead pencil. "This," he asked, "is the window of Mr. Bellview's private office?"

"Yes."

"I notice what appears to be the back of a young woman standing right here. Would that be near the vault?"

"Yes. The vault door is right there."

"This man, I take it, is Jason Bellview?"

"Yes."

Lester Leith said, "Someone over here is holding a broomstick."

She looked at the photograph, then burst out laughing. "That's not a broomstick. It's a gun."

"A rifle?" Leith asked.

"No," she said, smiling, "a shotgun. The man who's trying to play hero is Frank Packerson, the editor of our house organ, the *Pidico News*. He's a trapshooting enthusiast. He'd been out in the country doing some shooting over the weekend. He got back to town too late Monday morning to go to his apartment, so he brought his gun up to the office and left it there, as he does occasionally."

"I see," Lester Leith said, "and he's on the look-out for burglars in this picture, I suppose?"

"I guess so. He really did a decent job yesterday. He grabbed his shotgun and dashed out into the corridor as soon as he heard the screaming for police across the street. He says no one except the inventor and, a few moments later, Mr. Bellview appeared in the corridor. That shows pretty conclusively that the taking of the blueprints was an inside job, and that — that —"

"Go on," Leith said.

"That they weren't taken out as far as the corridor. They're concealed somewhere in the offices."

"How many offices would be available as places of concealment?"

She said, "I've been thinking that over. There is a whole string of them. They all have communicating doors, and then there's the corridor which runs the whole length of the offices. But the point is, Mr. Leith, that no one went along the corridor and no one crossed the corridor. Packerson is positive on that point. He'd have shot in a minute if he'd seen anything that was out of the way — such as someone running away."

"That would mean, then, that the blueprints must have been hidden somewhere in the string of offices which are next to the windows that open on the street?" Leith asked.

"Yes."

Leith said, indicating the photograph with a sweeping gesture of his hand, "Somewhere in the area which is covered in this photograph."

"That's right."

Leith tapped a spot on the photo-

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graph with the point of a lead pencil. "Who's this?"

She frowned, said, "Let me see that glass. It's a little hazy."

Leith gave her the magnifying glass.

"Oh, yes. That's Tarver Slade. He's a man who showed up four or five days ago to go over our books."

"An auditor?" Leith asked.

"Oh, no. Just one of those State tax men who come in at intervals for a check-up. No one pays very much attention to them. They're terrible pests, want you to stop everything to explain little simple points. If we took them seriously, we'd never get any work done. Nowadays, we just give them an office and let them alone."

Lester Leith said, "This man seems to be putting on an overcoat."

"Yes. I've noticed that if the weather's at all cold, he wears his overcoat whenever he goes out. I guess he had rheumatism. At times he walks with a pronounced limp, then again he seems all right."

Lester Leith took out a notebook and made a cryptic entry. "Just jotting down the names of these people," he explained. "Now, can you give me a few more names from the photographs?"

Taking Leith's pencil, Bernice Lamen checked off the various persons whose faces appeared in the window. Only some four or five whose heads were bent down, looking at the sidewalk, she couldn't recognize.

Lester Leith slipped the enlarged photographs back into his brief-case. "Thank you very much, Miss Lamen. I think I have a swell angle for writing my article, *How It Feels to Throw a Fur Cape out of the Window.*"

"Mr. Leith," Millie Foster said, "please be frank with us. What are you after?"

"Why, I'm after a human interest story."

"Surely you don't expect us to believe that a person would go to all this expense to get material for a story he wasn't even sure of selling?"

Leith smiled.

Bernice Lamen said, "It's a story that would interest *me.* I think the photos are swell."

"Aren't they!" Leith said enthusiastically. "They should be. They cost seventy-five dollars."

Millicent said, "Good night — should I say, Santa Claus?"

Leith paused with his hand on the knob. "You might look in your stocking," he said, and quietly left the apartment.

Lester Leith opened the door of the penthouse apartment, said, "Right this way, men."

The startled undercover man looked up to see half a dozen men who were probably taxi-drivers carrying a miscellaneous assortment which included a desk, a swivel chair, a typewriter, a filing cabinet, a wastebasket, and a cabinet for holding stationery.

"Scuttle," Lester Leith said, "kindly move the chair out of that corner. All right, boys, just put the stuff in there — the desk right in the

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corner — the typewriter on the desk, the wastebasket to the side of the typewriter, and the swivel chair, of course, right by the desk."

The valet stared at the strange procession which trooped its way across the thick carpets of the penthouse apartment. When they had gone, he moved about, dusting the furniture.

"Are you employing a secretary?" he asked.

Lester Leith regarded him reproachfully. "Scuttle, I am going to work."

"To *work?*"

"Yes. I am going to write stories which will interpret the hidden significance of things. I am going to fight my way to the top."

"Yes, sir. A novel perhaps, sir?"

"Not fiction, Scuttle. I am going to dramatize incidents. For instance, Scuttle, how would it feel to throw three hundred and fifty dollars out of a window?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir."

"But you'd be interested in finding out, wouldn't you?"

"Well, sir — ahem — Of course, if you say so, sir. Yes, sir."

"That's exactly it," Leith said. "Today a woman threw a three-hundred-and-fifty-dollar fur cape out of the window. How did it feel? What were her sensations? She has told me her innermost thoughts. I'll write them out at fever heat, Scuttle. Words will pour from my fingertips onto the paper. The incident will live, will be perpetuated to posterity."

Lester Leith whipped off his coat, handed it to the valet. "Hang it up, Scuttle."

Leith jerked out the chair, sat down at the typewriter, fed a piece of paper into the roller.

"May I ask why the delivery by taxi-cab?" the spy asked in a last desperate effort to get information.

Leith said, without looking up, "Don't interrupt me, Scuttle. I'm concentrating — delivery by taxicab? — why, of course. I had to buy these things at a second-hand place in the cheaper district because the other stores were closed. Those little places don't make deliveries. I had six taxicabs — quite a procession, Scuttle. Now let's see, how would we start this? I'll want it in the first person. Ah, yes! I have a title. *Throwing Money Away, by Winnie Gail as told to Lester Leith.*"

Lester Leith laboriously tapped out the title and by-line on the typewriter, then pushed back his chair to stare at the blank sheet of paper. "Now, I'll need a beginning. Let's see — *I tossed the fur cape out of the window.* No, that doesn't sound right. I want something more dramatic. Let's see now — *I tried on the fur cape the salesgirl handed me. It was a perfect fit. I was pleased with the soft luxury of the glossy fur. And I pitched it out of the window.*"

Lester Leith cocked his head on one side, studied the valet's expression. "How does that sound, Scuttle?"

"Very good, sir."

"Your face doesn't show it, Scuttle.

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There's a complete lack of enthusiasm."

"Yes, sir. If you'll permit me to say so, it sounds like the devil, sir."

"Yes," Lester Leith admitted, "it should be done more subtly."

He pushed back his chair, shoved his thumbs through the armholes of his vest, stared at the keyboard of the typewriter for several minutes, then got up and started pacing the floor. "Scuttle, how *do* writers get their inspiration?"

"I don't know, sir."

"The thing sounded so easy when I thought about it in general terms, but getting it down specifically . . . I simply can't say, *I threw it out of the window.* Yet I don't know what else to say. Well, Scuttle, I'll make a start. It seems to me I've read somewhere that successful authors don't simply sit down and dash off a story, but have to labor over it, making many revisions, choosing their words with the greatest of care."

"Yes, sir."

"And," Lester Leith went on, "I'll try to get some new angle."

Leith sat down at the typewriter once more, doggedly began tapping off the words. The spy hovered obsequiously in the background.

"You needn't wait up, Scuttle. I'll probably be all hours."

"Can't I get you something, some Scotch and soda or —"

"No, Scuttle, I'm working."

"Very good, sir. If you don't mind, I thought I'd step out for a moment for a breath of air."

"Quite all right, Scuttle. Go ahead," Leith said, without looking up from the typewriter.

The spy walked down to the corner drug store, called police headquarters, and got Sergeant Ackley on the line.

"Beaver," Ackley demanded, "what was the meaning of that procession of taxicabs driving up to the place?"

The spy said, "He's becoming a writer. He got the inspiration for a story, and he had to start at it right away. He picked up a lot of secondhand furniture, typewriters, filing cases, and all that sort of junk, and had them delivered by taxicab."

Sergeant Ackley groaned. "You never know whether he's kidding you or actually slipping something over."

Ackley groaned again.

There was a subtle tension throughout the offices of the Precision Instrument Designing and Installation Company. Beneath the routine exterior of a smoothly functioning business organization was that strain which manifests itself in surreptitious glances and whispered conferences in the restrooms.

Frank Packerson, editor of the *Pidico News*, the house organ of the company, sat in his private office, a pencil in his hand, aimlessly tracing designs on a sheet of paper.

The interoffice communicating system buzzer sounded, and Packerson almost mechanically threw the lever which made the connection. The voice of the girl at the information desk said, "An author is here with a

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manuscript which he is willing to sell for five hundred dollars to the *Pidico News.*"

Packerson was startled. "A manuscript — five hundred dollars?"

"Yes."

"Tell him we don't buy manuscripts. All our stuff is staff written. Tell him they don't allow me five hundred dollars for an entire issue."

"Yes, Mr. Packerson. I told him, but he insisted I should notify you. He also has a gun he wishes to sell."

"A gun?"

"Yes, sir."

Packerson was interested. "What sort of gun?"

"He says it's a genuine Ithabore over-and-under which he's willing to sell for fifteen dollars."

"A genuine Ithabore!" Packerson exclaimed. "For fifteen dollars?"

"Yes, sir."

Gun enthusiast that he was, Packerson could no more resist such a bargain than a baseball fan could turn down a free ticket to the World Series.

"Tell him to come in."

Packerson had expected some shabby out-at-the-elbows individual with long hair and glittering eyes. He was hardly prepared for the suave, well-dressed man who entered his office, carrying a brief-case in his right hand and two sole-leather gun cases over his left shoulder.

Instantly suspicious, Packerson said, "Understand, my man, I'm not buying guns from persons whom I know nothing about. I'll want a complete history of the gun."

"Oh, certainly," Lester Leith said. "I'm prepared to give you a bill of sale."

"I want more than a bill of sale. I'll want to know something about you. That price is — well, it's absurd for a genuine Ithabore over-and-under."

Lester Leith laughed. "Want me to make the price sixty dollars?"

Packerson flushed. "I'm only interested in getting another gun if the price is right. I'd hardly anticipated dealing with a well-dressed stranger who very apparently has *two* guns for sale. I think you can appreciate my position, Mr. — er —"

"Leith," his visitor said.

"Well, I think you see my position."

Lester Leith laughed. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Packerson, I am willing to sell this Ithabore cheap because I simply can't hit a thing with it; whereas I have a Betterbilt that simply knocks 'em dead."

Packerson shook his head. "I don't like the Betterbilt. I like an Ithabore over-and-under, without too much drop in the stock."

Leith said, "You should like this gun." He opened one of the gun cases, and Packerson gave the gun first a casual inspection, then put it together, tried the lock, swung it up to his shoulder once or twice, and turned to Leith with a puzzled expression.

"How much did you say you wanted for this?"

"Fifteen dollars."

Packerson stared at him suspiciously.

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"For reference," Leith said, "you can ring up my banker."

Packerson said, "I suppose you know what that gun cost new."

"Certainly."

"Then why the fifteen-dollar price?"

Leith hesitated for a moment, suddenly said, "I'll be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Packerson. I think there's a little bulge in the barrel. You can't see it when you're inside, but if you'll step over to the window and let the sun shine along the barrel, you can see it — a peculiar line of half-shadow."

Packerson walked over to the window, pushed the gun barrel out into the sunlight, studied it thoughtfully. Lester Leith remained at Packerson's desk, smoking a cigarette.

After a minute of close scrutiny, Packerson turned back to say, "I don't think — Well, there *may* be a slight bulge. I would say it was worth more than fifteen dollars, however."

Leith said, "Well, to tell you the truth, Mr. Packerson, I thought if I'd make the price sufficiently attractive, I could get you to look at my manuscript. I —"

Packerson shook his head emphatically. "We don't buy any outside material."

Leith said with dignity, "Under those circumstances, I think I'd prefer to give some other editor an opportunity to look at the gun."

Packerson's face colored. "So that's the game! You want to bribe me to buy a manuscript for five hundred dollars by selling me an Ithabore for about a tenth of what it's worth. Why, you crook! Get out of here! Go on, take your gun! What sort of man do you think I am, anyway? A cheap bribe like that!"

Lester Leith, summoning what dignity he could muster, picked up his brief-case, swung the sole-leather gun cases over his shoulder and walked out, while Frank Packerson followed him to the door to finish what he had to say.

Lester Leith was just emerging from the elevator when he saw Bernice Lamen step from a bus at the corner and start walking with quick businesslike steps toward the entrance of the Rust Commercial Building. He waited until she caught his eye.

She stopped to stare at him in astonishment. "What in the world!" she exclaimed.

Leith said, "You look happy."

"I am. But what in the world are you doing with all the arsenal?"

Leith said, "I am in the depths of despondency."

"Why? What's the matter?"

"I worked so hard on my story," Leith sighed, "and now it's been rejected."

"Where did you submit it?"

"To the *Pidico News*. Your editor, Frank Packerson, was uninterested."

"Good Heavens," she said, "he doesn't have any money to buy outside manuscripts."

Leith said, "Money wasn't the big inducement. I wanted to see my name in print."

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She studied him with a puzzled frown, drawing her finely arched brows into a straighter line. "Are you serious?"

"Never more serious in my life, but let's not talk about my troubles. What makes you look so happy?"

She said, "I've just received a personal apology from Jason Bellview and instructions to return to work."

"You mean you've been exonerated?"

"Well, at least they've decided I can go back to work."

Leith said thoughtfully, "I don't see that as any cause of jubilation."

"You would if you were dependent on a salary and if being let out under suspicious circumstances would prevent you from getting a job anywhere else."

"That bad?" Leith asked.

"That bad, and worse."

"Under the circumstances," Leith announced, "we need a drink. You to celebrate, I to recuperate."

"I've got to go to work."

Leith said, "On the contrary, that is the worst thing you could do."

"What do you mean?"

"Where's your sense of independence? Are you going to let them insult you, drag you down to the office of a private detective, grill you, have the police take over, give you the third degree, be smeared with the brush of suspicion, held up to the ridicule of your fellow employees, and then grasp eagerly at the first sop they hand you, and rush back to work?"

"Why not?"

"Because there are better ways. You should make them respect you. You should demand a public apology and some remuneration for the inconvenience they've caused you, to say nothing of the damage they've done to your reputation."

"I'm afraid I'm not built that way."

Leith surveyed her critically. "There is," he announced, "nothing wrong with your build."

She flushed, then laughed. "Really, Mr. Leith, I'm sorry about your story having been rejected, but I can't stand here chatting. I've work to do."

Leith indicated his car parked at the curb. He asked, "Couldn't you postpone it for about thirty minutes — just long enough to have a drink?"

She hesitated.

"And if you'd let me handle Jason Bellview," he said, "I feel quite certain that he would make an apology in front of all the employees of the Precision Instrument Designing and Installation Company."

She said, "I'd just love to have that happen, but it's asking too much. Bellview would die first."

Leith said, "Let's talk it over while we're having a drink. I know where they make some marvelous spiced coffee with brandy and cinnamon bark, orange peel, and — Oh, come on. We'll talk it over there."

She said, "Well, all right, but I don't want to be too late."

Fifteen minutes later, over a restaurant table, they watched a deft waiter mix ingredients, saw the blue flame of burning brandy flicker up-

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ward to cast an aromatic halo about the bowl, as the waiter stirred the mixture with a silver ladle. Then, when he had lifted out two cups of the spiced beverage and discreetly withdrawn, Leith said, "At least let me ring up Jason Bellview."

"What would you tell him?"

Leith said, "I'd tell him that he had done you a great wrong, that you wouldn't return to work until he paid you ten thousand dollars and made a public apology. Then, after a little trading, I'd settle for five thousand."

She said, "Five seconds after you telephoned, I'd be out of a job."

Leith gravely took a billfold from his pocket. From it he took ten one-hundred-dollar bills and placed them in a neat pile on the tablecloth. "I have one thousand dollars," he announced, "which says that no such thing would happen."

She stared at the money, then raised her eyes to his face. "You're the strangest individual I've ever met."

"At least that's something," Leith acknowledged. "In these days of widespread mediocrity, it's something to be outstanding, even if one is given credit for a mild brand of insanity."

"There's nothing mild about it," she retorted, laughing. "Are you really serious?"

By way of answer Leith caught the waiter's eye. "Bring me a telephone."

The waiter brought a telephone with a long extension cord, plugged it into a phone jack at the table. Lester Leith consulted his notebook and swiftly dialed a number.

Bernice Lamen watched him with apprehensive eyes.

"Hello," Leith said, "I want to talk with Mr. Jason Bellview. Tell him it's about his blueprints."

During the interval which elapsed, while Leith was waiting for Jason Bellview to come on the line, Bernice Lamen said, "In about ten minutes I'm going to think this was the most madly insane impulse I ever had in my life. I'll kick myself all around the block for not stopping you; but right now I'm curious and — and —"

A heavy masculine voice came over the wire, saying, "Yes, this is Bellview. What's this about the blueprints?"

Lester Leith said suavely, "I wanted to talk with you about Miss Lamen."

"What about her?"

Leith said, "You've damaged her character. You've accused her of a crime. You've forced her into submitting to a most humiliating experience. Now, you apparently think that —"

"Who's this talking?" Bellview roared in a voice so loud that it seemed his words might rip the receiver apart.

"This is Lester Leith."

"You a lawyer?"

"No," Leith said. "I'm a friend. I'm hoping that it won't be necessary . . ."

"Well, if you're not a lawyer, what business is it of yours?"

Leith said, "I'm a financier."

"A what?"

"A financier. I finance various busi-

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ness activities. At present I'm financing Miss Lamen in her claim against you. I'm hoping it isn't going to be necessary to get a lawyer."

"Get a hundred lawyers!" Bellview shouted.

"Very well," Leith said, "only kindly remember that I offered to make a reasonable settlement with you. Perhaps you'd better consult your own attorney and see what *he* has to say."

"I refuse to pay blackmail!" Bellview said.

"Have it your own way," Leith said. "Only remember, when your company gets involved in a hundred-thousand-dollar lawsuit and your lawyer tells you you haven't a leg to stand on, that you had a chance to settle the case out of court. And if the stockholders of the Precision Instrument Designing and Installation Company learn of it . . ."

"Say, wait a minute. I never turn down anything sight unseen. What's your figure?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

"All right, it's turned down. I feel better now. You couldn't stick us for that much."

"That's what *you* think."

Bellview said, "That's what I know. Goodbye."

The sound made by the slamming receiver at the other end of the line was distinctly audible.

Bernice Lamen sighed. "I knew it," she said.

Lester Leith picked up the ten one-hundred-dollar bills, slid them over under her saucer. "Remember, you've got these coming if it doesn't work."

"No. I can't take the money — but we're licked. He's already reached his decision. It was a gamble, and we lost."

Leith smiled. "Under those circumstances, we'd better have a little more spiced coffee. There's no reason for you to go back to the office now."

Tears came to her eyes. She blinked them back, laughed, and said, "Oh, well, it was fun while it lasted."

Leith said, "Well, don't worry about it. Things are happening about the way I thought they would."

"You mean you thought he'd turn you down?"

Leith nodded.

"Then why did you do it?"

"Because he'll think it over and call up his lawyer. After we've had another cup of coffee, I'll call him up again, and then you may hear a different story."

They chatted over the second cup of coffee, had a brandy and benedictine; and then Leith dialed Jason Bellview's number again, and got the crusty president of the instrument company on the line. This time Bellview's voice was cautious. "Listen, Leith, perhaps you won't have to go to a lawyer. The more I think of it, the more I think Miss Lamen is entitled to something — but ten thousand, of course, is out of the question."

"She'll want an apology," Leith said, "delivered in front of the entire office force."

Bellview hesitated for a minute.

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"That might be arranged," he conceded.

"And," Leith went on, "she'll want ten thousand dollars in cash."

"Wait a minute," Bellview said, and Leith heard the sounds of whispers at the other end of the line.

"We'll offer twenty-five hundred," Bellview said.

"Nothing doing," Leith told him. "Ten or nothing. The minute I hang up, I'm going to see my lawyer. Personally, I think she's entitled to a real nice chunk of money. You —"

"Wait a minute," Bellview said.

This time there was no attempt to disguise the whispering. Leith could even hear the hum of low-voiced conversation.

"You send Bernice Lamen up to my office," Bellview instructed.

Leith laughed and said, "No chance. You don't talk with her until you've agreed to pay ten thousand. Otherwise, you talk with a lawyer."

There was a momentary pause; then Leith heard Bellview mutter, apparently to some person standing beside him, "He says it's ten or nothing. That's too much. What do we do?"

The low voice made a suggestion; then Bellview said into the telephone, "I'll put my cards on the table. My lawyer's here. We've talked this thing over. You *may* have a lawsuit. You may not. We'll pay five thousand as a cash settlement."

Lester Leith smiled into the transmitter. "You've saved yourself a lawsuit," he said.

"All right, tell Miss Lamen to come up here right away."

Lester Leith dropped the receiver into place, reached across, and picked up the one thousand dollars from under Bernice Lamen's saucer.

She looked up at him, her eyes large with incredulity. "You mean —"

Leith said, "You may not stand much chance, but with that face and figure, you should at least go to Hollywood and try for a screen test. A girl can do a lot on five thousand dollars."

Captain Carmichael was enjoying a cigar and the sporting page of the morning newspaper when Sergeant Ackley, carrying a cardboard folder, entered the office.

"What is it this time?" Carmichael asked, frowning as he looked up.

Sergeant Ackley sat down on the other side of the captain's desk. "This guy Leith," he said disgustedly.

"What about him?"

"Beaver said he'd written a letter to me, and he thought it might be a good idea for me to know what was in the letter before Leith signed it and mailed it."

Captain Carmichael's eyes danced. "A confession?"

"You listen to it," Sergeant Ackley said, "then you can tell me."

Ackley turned back the pasteboard folder, read from a carbon copy of a letter:

My dear Sergeant: The original manuscripts of famous authors have at times commanded fabulous prices. It is, perhaps,

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conceited to think that my own efforts will some day be worth thousands of dollars to the discriminating collector. Yet, after all, Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson, and other famous writers must have felt the same way when they regarded their manuscripts.

This story, my dear Sergeant, has been rejected by the publisher, which may make it even more valuable. In any event, I want you to have it as a token of friendship and as some slight measure of my appreciation for the zealous efforts you have made to enforce the law, even when my own convenience has been sacrificed to your zeal.

Sergeant Ackley looked up. "Now what," he asked, "do you make of that?"

"Nothing," Captain Carmichael said.

"That's the way I feel about it, but he told Beaver the letter wasn't to be mailed until tomorrow, so Beaver thought I might want to know about it today."

"What's the manuscript?" Carmichael asked.

"A bunch of tripe," Ackley said.

"Did you read it?"

"Oh, I glanced through it."

Captain Carmichael reached for the manuscript. "This is a carbon copy?"

"Uh huh."

"How come?"

"He isn't going to mail this letter until tomorrow, you see, and he has the original story with him."

Captain Carmichael frowningly regarded the carbon copy. "He must have some reason for sending it to you."

"Just wants to give me the old razzberry."

Captain Carmichael frowned at the end of his cigar. "Don't be too certain, Sergeant. You know Leith may have intended to grab off the swag, and then give you a tip to the crook."

"Why should he do that?"

"Well, you know this crime is a little different from the other crimes we've worked on. This is getting pretty close to treason, and I don't think Leith would care very much about shielding a traitor."

"All he cares about is getting the swag."

"And you've read through this?" Carmichael asked.

Sergeant Ackley fished a cigar from his waistcoat pocket and nodded.

Carmichael turned rapidly through the pages. Suddenly he said, "Wait a minute. What's this?"

"Where?" Ackley asked.

"On page five," Carmichael said. "Listen to this:

"It isn't every place that would be suitable as a hiding place for a set of blueprints. It would take a long, hollow tube, and such a tube would be hard to conceal."

"Well," Ackley snorted, "what's significant about that?"

Captain Carmichael's face showed his excitement. "Wait a minute!" he exclaimed. "That's just paving the way for the next paragraph. Listen to this:

"As soon as the actress I had employed started screaming for the police, I noticed a man pick up a shotgun. This man was in the offices of the Precision Instrument

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Company, standing in the doorway of an office which adjoined that containing the vault. A shotgun. How interesting!"

Captain Carmichael looked up. "Well, don't you get it?"

"Get what?" Sergeant Ackley said.

"The shotgun!" Carmichael shouted.

Sergeant Ackley said, "We know all about that. Frank Packerson, the editor of the *Pidico* house organ, had been trapshooting, and —"

"Are there some photographs that go with this?" Carmichael asked.

"The same ones you saw. They don't mean anything."

"The shotgun!" Captain Carmichael shouted. "Don't you get it, you fool? The shotgun!"

"What about it?"

Captain Carmichael pushed back his chair. His voice showed that he was making an effort to keep his temper. "Tomorrow, Lester Leith wanted you to read this manuscript. You're reading it just twenty-four hours early. In this manuscript Leith intended to show you how to get the man who had stolen those blueprints. By that time Leith intended to have the blueprints and have covered his tracks so you could never get anything on him. By virtue of some nice brain work on the part of Beaver, you get this stuff twenty-four hours early — and haven't sense enough to know what it means."

Sergeant Ackley's face became a shade darker. "Well," he demanded, "what does it mean?"

Captain Carmichael got to his feet. "Get a squad car," he said, "and I'll show you."

Frank Packerson clicked on the interoffice loud-speaker. The reception clerk announced, "Two gentlemen from headquarters."

Packerson smiled. "Show them in."

Captain Carmichael did the talking. "We're working on that blueprint case, Packerson. The thief must have had some unusual hiding place prepared in advance. All he needed was a second or two to slip the blueprints out of the vault and into this hiding place.

"In other words," Carmichael went on, "the theory we're working on now is that the thief had some hiding place so carefully prepared that, while it was instantly available, no one would ever have thought to look there. A hiding place where he could push the blueprint — a long, smooth, slender tube. After that, the tube could be taken out of the building without arousing suspicion."

Packerson wasn't smiling now.

"A man could be holding a shotgun in his hands," Captain Carmichael went on, "standing right in front of the safe, asserting that he was looking for a thief, and people would naturally regard the shotgun as a weapon — *not as a hiding place!*"

Packerson's face was flushed. Little beads of perspiration dotted his forehead. He cleared his throat and said, "I don't know what you're insinuating, Captain. In my case, it happens that I had a gun. Naturally,

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when I was aroused by someone shouting for the police, I grabbed the gun. Are you insinuating . . ."

"That you shoved the blueprints down the barrel," Captain Carmichael said.

"No, no! I swear that I didn't, absolutely not!"

Captain Carmichael was insistent. "Yes, you did, Packerson. You grabbed your gun and stood right by the vault, holding it in your hands. Everyone thought you were standing there, protecting the property of the company. No one realized that you yourself—"

"I tell you, I didn't. I . . ."

Captain Carmichael got up. "Let's take a look at your gun, Packerson."

Packerson pushed back his chair, grabbed the gun which was reposing behind his desk. "No," he asserted. "That gun is my private property. You can't look at it unless you have a search warrant."

Sergeant Ackley moved belligerently forward.

Packerson jumped back and raised the gun as though to swing it as a weapon. "Keep away from me," he shouted, "or I'll cave in your skull—"

He ceased talking abruptly as his eyes came to focus on the small black hole which was the business end of Captain Carmichael's revolver.

"Stick 'em up," Carmichael said.

Packerson hesitated for a moment, then dropped the gun. His knees buckled. Crouching on the floor, his hands covering his face, he sobbed, "I'm ruined."

"You got the blueprints in there now?" Captain Carmichael asked.

Packerson shook his head. "The money for them," he said.

Carmichael exchanged a significant glance with Sergeant Ackley. "Who gave you the money, Packerson?"

"Gilbert, the furrier."

"He planned the whole thing?" Carmichael asked.

"Him and Fanny Gillmeyer. There really wasn't any customer. Fanny kept watching the offices over here. When she saw the coast was clear so that I could dash into the vault, grab the blueprints, and get out before anyone noticed what I was doing, she tossed the cape out of the window and started yelling for the police. I had just time to grab the shotgun, jump into the vault, push the blueprints down the barrel, and then stand with the gun at my shoulder."

"Where are the blueprints now?"

"I gave them to Gilbert. I walked out last night carrying my trap gun, and walked right past the guard."

Captain Carmichael frowned. "Then you brought the gun back again today?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Don't you see?" Packerson said. "I got thirty thousand dollars for those blueprints. The money's in fifty-dollar bills. I didn't dare to leave that money in my room, and I didn't dare to keep it in my possession. So I rolled the bills into packages that would just fit the gun barrel and shoved them in the barrel of the gun.

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In that way, I could keep the money with me all the time. In case anyone began to suspect me and I had to take it on the lam, I was all ready for a getaway."

Carmichael gave a low whistle. "So there's thirty thousand dollars in that gun?"

Packerson nodded.

Carmichael walked around the desk, stooped down, picked up the gun, and broke the barrel open.

It was Sergeant Ackley who blurted out, "There's no money in here now."

Captain Carmichael kicked Ackley's shins. Packerson jumped to his feet. "No money in there!" He grabbed at the gun, stared at it with startled eyes, and said, "But *that's not my gun!*"

Captain Carmichael nudged Sergeant Ackley in the ribs.

"It's not my gun," Packerson repeated. "It's the same make, and the same model, but my gun had a scratch and . . ." His voice trailed away.

"Well, go on," Sergeant Ackley said.

A crafty smile came over Packerson's face. "Ha, ha," he said. "That's a great joke on you."

"What is?" Ackley asked.

"Of course it's my gun," Packerson said. "I never saw the blueprints; but since you birds thought you were such good detectives, I thought I'd kid you along for a while."

Captain Carmichael said, "A quick thinker, aren't you, Packerson?"

Sergeant Ackley turned to the captain with a puzzled frown. "I don't get it at all, Cap," he said.

Captain Carmichael pulled handcuffs from his hip pocket. "If," he announced, "you'd kept your big mouth shut about the money not being there, we'd have had a complete confession. As it is, we can still get those blueprints if we get after Gilbert and that clerk of his right away. As far as the money is concerned — well, we can still get *that*, if we work fast enough, thanks to the fact that you got your manuscript twenty-four hours in advance. *Now* do you get it, dumb head?"

Sergeant Ackley was staring at Captain Carmichael with eyes that seemed unable to focus. "You mean — Lester Leith — been here — changed guns. . . ."

"Exactly," Captain Carmichael said. "Now, come on, first to Gilbert's . . ."

Bernice Lamen lingered over her last drink with Lester Leith. Her eyes, as she raised them to regard his profile, were warm with appreciation. "I don't know," she said, "how I can ever thank you. I —"

One of the bus boys, who had been standing near the window, approached the table and bent deferentially above Lester Leith. "Excuse me," he interrupted, "but is your car number XL552?"

Leith's eyes narrowed. "That's my license number," he admitted.

"I think you've violated a parking ordinance. I've noticed a couple of cops looking it over, and now they're

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sitting in a squad car just outside of the door, apparently waiting for you to come back to the car."

Lester Leith absently fished a roll of bills from his pocket, peeled off a ten-dollar bill, and pushed it into the bus boy's hand. "Thanks very much," he said. "I tore up a couple of traffic tickets. I guess they've caught up with me. By the way, could you get me about a hundred of these paper cocktail napkins?"

The bus boy stared at the bill. "Gee, Mister, thanks. Paper napkins? Gosh, yes, I should say so."

Lester Leith turned to his feminine companion. "On second thought," he said, "I think it would be better for you to have your talk with Jason Bellview without me being there. Now, I'm going to leave the restaurant in a few minutes, and you'd better wait ten or fifteen minutes before you go out; then take a taxicab to Bellview's office."

The bus boy brought a huge stack of small paper cocktail napkins.

"My gun," Lester Leith explained, "needs cleaning. I wonder if I could step out in the kitchen to run some napkins through it?"

"Why, certainly, but you don't need to use napkins. I can get you a rag and —"

"No," Leith said. "Napkins really work better." He got to his feet, bowed to Bernice Lamen.

Puzzled, she saw him follow the bus boy in the direction of the kitchen, nor was she greatly surprised when he failed to return. She waited a full fifteen minutes, then started for the door.

"Wait a minute," the bus boy said. "He's forgot one of his guns."

"Oh, that's right, he did. He's gone?"

"Yes. Out through the kitchen door into the alley."

Bernice Lamen smiled brightly. "Under those circumstances, you'd better keep this gun here — until he calls for it later."

Sergeant Ackley, sitting in the squad car, suddenly grabbed Captain Carmichael's arm. "By George, here he comes down that side street. *And he's got the gun with him.*"

Captain Carmichael said, "Take it easy now, Sergeant. Don't tip our hand until we know we're right."

Lester Leith, a gun case swung over his shoulder, a brief-case in his hand, walked up to his car, slid in behind the wheel.

Captain Carmichael said, "Okay, Sergeant, do your stuff, but don't make the arrest unless you're certain you've caught him red-handed."

Sergeant Ackley nodded, slid out of the squad car, and started back toward Leith's automobile.

Lester Leith was just pressing his foot on the starter when Sergeant Ackley tapped him on the shoulder.

Leith looked up. His face showed incredulous surprise. "You!" he said.

Sergeant Ackley's grin was triumphant. "Just checking up on stolen shotguns, Leith," he said. "That shotgun in the case is yours all right?"

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Leith hesitated perceptibly.

"I'll just take a look at it," Sergeant Ackley said.

He pulled the gun case out through the window, unfastened the end of the gun case, pulled out the barrels, and held them to the light. The left-hand barrel shone with a clear, smooth polish. The right-hand barrel was choked up with rolled papers.

Sergeant Ackley's grin was triumphant. He tossed the gun into the back of the car. "Come on, Leith," he said. "You're going to headquarters."

Leith said, "I don't get you."

"No. But *I've* got *you*," Sergeant Ackley gloated. "It's been a long lane, but this is where the turn comes. Drive to headquarters, or I'll put the nippers on you and call the wagon."

Without a word Leith started the car and drove to headquarters. Following along behind, Captain Carmichael guarded against any break for escape.

In front of the desk sergeant, Ackley permitted himself a bit of gloating. "All right, boys," he said, "I'll show you a little shrewd deduction. Give me something I can push down the barrel of this shotgun, and I'll show you a little parlor magic."

"Cut the comedy," Captain Carmichael said.

But Sergeant Ackley couldn't resist an opportunity to gloat. "Notice," he said as one of the officers handed him a wooden dowel, "that I have nothing in either hand and nothing up my sleeve. I push this wooden dowel through the left barrel of the shotgun, and nothing happens. Now then, I push it through the right barrel, and you'll see thirty thousand dollars in fifty-dollar bills come showering out on the floor."

Ackley pushed hard with the improvised ramrod.

There was a period of surprised silence; then a gale of laughter ran around the room as a shower of paper cocktail napkins burst from the barrel of the shotgun.

"A new scheme," Leith said urbanely. "Someone told me it would keep a barrel from rusting. I decided to use paper in the right barrel and nothing in the left, put the gun away for six months, and see which barrel was in better condition. I'm sorry, Sergeant, but you've destroyed my experiment."

Captain Carmichael took Sergeant Ackley's arm. "Come on," he said.

Lester Leith said, to the desk sergeant, "I really didn't steal those cocktail napkins. They were given to me."

Captain Carmichael rushed Sergeant Ackley outside.

"Blast it, Sergeant, I told you that the big danger about using the Chinese method of fishing was that you had to keep a rope tied tightly around the bird's neck."

Sergeant Ackley said, "Gosh, Captain, I'd like to get one of those pelican birds for that lake up in —"

"It wouldn't do you any good," Captain Carmichael snapped. "You wouldn't know how to tie up a bird's neck so he couldn't swallow the fish."

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*In the final reckoning, a writer is known by the characters he creates, and the better known the characters, the more successful the writer. Consider the parade of protagonists who have become household names, eternal flames: Robinson Crusoe — D'Artagnan — David Copperfield — Tom Sawyer — Nick Carter — David Harum — Sherlock Holmes — The Wizard of Oz — Little Lord Fauntleroy — Mrs. Wiggs — Pollyanna — Tarzan — Penrod — all* living *characters, as well-known as Mickey Mouse. And they will remain universal in appeal, retain the common touch, long after the names of their creators have faded from memory. Surely more people remember the name of Robinson Crusoe than the name of Defoe. And who wrote — quickly now!* — LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY? *Or* MRS. WIGGS OF THE CABBAGE PATCH? *And even experts are still not certain who created the original Nick Carter.*

*Perhaps some day the name of P. G. Wodehouse will seem only vaguely familiar. But the name of at least one of his characters has already achieved a permanent place in the English language. Who does not know Jeeves, the pluperfect butler? Well, we wish we could bring you an adventure of Jeeves in which that wonderful man displays his talents as a detective, but unfortunately no such tale exists. At least, we could never find one, and the last time we spoke with Mr. Wodehouse he was kind enough to rack his brains — but to no avail.*

*But we can bring you a new short-short story by "the Master of those who laugh," introducing Mr. McGee, the house dick at the Hotel Delehay — a man who never forgets a face . . .*

# MR. McGEE'S BIG DAY

*by P. G. WODEHOUSE*

EVERY night when Mr. McGee got home to his snug little house in Astoria, he would stand inside the front door, sniffing, and his wife would call from the kitchen "Is that you, John?" and he would reply — for, except when you got him on the topic of the motion pictures, he was a man of few words — "Yeah." He would then proceed to the kitchen and sniff again.

"Stew?"

"Stew."

"Ah."

"Well," Mrs. McGee would say. "Anything happen today?" and he would say, "Not a thing."

Sometimes visitors, friends of his wife, with whose company he would gladly have dispensed, for it meant putting on his shoes, would say, "Yours must be a very interesting



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life, Mr. McGee," and he would say, "Oh, I dunno," and they would say, "Doesn't anything exciting ever happen in that old hotel?" and he would say, "Not a thing." He would then turn the conversation to the subject of motion pictures, on which his knowledge was encyclopedic. He knew exactly how often all the stars had been divorced and why, how much each picture for the last twenty years had grossed, and how many Warner brothers there were. He even knew how many times Artie Shaw had been married, a thing Mr. Shaw could probably not have told you himself.

Mr. McGee was the house detective at the Hotel Delehay. It was his duty to sit in the lobby keeping an eye on the drifting throng and holding himself in readiness to become active at any moment and put a stop to anything which his critical mind classified as funny business. The citizens who come and go in hotel lobbies are not as a class prone to funny business, but you cannot keep the occasional black sheep out and, once in, these black sheep are only too likely to start something. When they did, Mr. McGee rose and stopped them, even if it meant, as generally happened, lowering himself to a vulgar brawl. He was, as a matter of fact, rather fond of vulgar brawls and acquitted himself well in them. In his hot youth, before settling down to the comparatively peaceful pursuit of hotel dicking, he had been with the Pinkertons. And you cannot hold down a job with the Pinkertons by mere amiability and charm of manner. Mr. McGee was getting on in years now, but the muscles of his brawny arms were still as strong as iron bands, and his footwork remained surprisingly good.

The ideal for which every house detective strives is not to look like a house detective, and in this Mr. McGee had been eminently successful. To the quietly dressed woman in dark glasses who had just dropped her bag not far from where he sat, he seemed a nice elderly gentleman, spruce and fatherly, with nothing on his mind except possibly that always difficult problem of whether to have a manhattan or a whiskey sour before lunch. She smiled pleasantly at him as he shot from his chair and retrieved the bag.

"Oh, thank you so much."

"Not at all, madam."

She passed on, and the episode, one would have said, was concluded. But on Mr. McGee's face, as he resumed his seat, there was a faintly puzzled look. The casual observer might have supposed from his pensive air that he was now wondering whether a bacardi would not hit the spot even more surely than a manhattan or a whiskey sour, but in reality he was engaged in the annoying task of trying — and failing — to remember a face. He was convinced that he had seen that woman before somewhere.

But where?

Nobody likes not being able to remember a face, particularly a man who prides himself, as did Mr. Mc-

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Gee, on never forgetting one. Old Eagle Eye, they called him around the hotel.

Detroit Dora? . . . No.

Chicago Kate? . . . No.

One of his wife's relations? . . . No. Much too well dressed. Besides, every one of his wife's female relations was a freak who could have walked straight into any side-show and no questions asked, whereas this dame, brief though their acquaintance had been, had impressed him as definitely belonging to the human species.

It is possible that Mr. McGee would have gone on brooding over the matter for the rest of the day, had there not at this moment appeared in his orbit of vision a face which he most certainly did remember. An elegant individual with a carnation in his buttonhole had paused to light a cigarette within a few feet of his chair, and Mr. McGee stiffened like a terrier at a rat hole.

A Pinkerton man who has served as house detective in a series of Broadway hotels gets to know by sight most of the malefactors familiar to the police of New York, London, Paris, and Chicago, and in this dapper man-about-town Mr. McGee had no difficulty in recognizing Herbert Higgs, alias Percy Stokes, alias Otis Fitzpatrick, alias Chauncey Cabot, alias Christopher Robin Cork, now being sought for a fifteen-thousand-dollar jewel robbery at the Pierre and arrested in 1938 — by Mr. McGee himself, as it so happened — for an even more ambitious venture at the Claridge. That this rat of the underworld should have had the effrontery to come horsing around in his own personal territory offended Mr. McGee, and he rose and began to prowl softly after the evildoer, endeavoring to give an impersonation of a well-preserved old gentleman who after weighing all the pros and cons had decided that, after all, there is nothing to beat an ordinary dry martini.

The party of the second part, hereinafter to be called the Disruptive Influence, had also, it appeared, a good memory for faces. He had cast a quick, startled glance at Mr. McGee, and now with a somewhat overdone carelessness he walked, whistling softly, up the stairs to the mezzanine floor. Close behind him pattered Mr. McGee. And as they rounded the turn at the landing, where stood a granite pedestal surmounted by a marble globe, the shallow pretense that they were a couple of strangers who just happened to be going the same way was abandoned simultaneously by both. The Disruptive Influence broke into a run. Mr. McGee broke into a run. They came together on the mezzanine floor, where the Disruptive Influence, evidently feeling that this was no time for half measures, turned and flung himself on Mr. McGee. The battle was joined.

Considering how alien and unsympathetic these two men were to one another, it is curious that in this crisis their minds should have reacted in

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identical fashion, as if they had been twin souls. The Disruptive Influence started at once to choke Mr. McGee. Mr. McGee started to choke the Disruptive Influence. For some moments, linked together, they swayed precariously at the top of the stairs: then, still locked in a close embrace, they rolled down to the landing.

It was the granite pedestal that for a while diverted Mr. McGee's attention from the matter in hand. The human projectile which they formed struck the pedestal solidly, and the marble globe, after tottering on its base, fell squarely on Mr. McGee's head, giving him a strange, dreamlike feeling. Stars were whirling before his eyes, and there seemed to be an unusual number of birds singing in the vicinity. Nature having equipped him with a head of the maximum thickness, he had not suffered any serious damage, but he relaxed his grip, and the Disruptive Influence, plainly feeling that there is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune, wrenched himself free and started down the stairs at a quick run.

He then started up them again at a quicker run and dived like a performing seal behind the pedestal. Policemen were pouring in through the revolving doors.

During the proceedings just described some fifty persons in the lobby had been interested spectators, and they had not failed to observe that something was happening. What that something was, few of them could have said. If Mr. McGee and companion were merely a couple of emotional friends embracing by way of celebrating a reunion after long separation, it seemed odd that they should be trying to throttle each other. And if they were doing it for television, where were the cameras and where was Milton Berle? It was only a question of time before some quick thinker should suspect that something was amiss and hasten out to inform the police. This had happened, and now there was entering through the revolving doors an assortment of the Finest, headed by Sergeant O'Toole, whose supporting cast included such zealous officers as Patrolman McGinnis, Patrolman Klein, and Patrolman Zabriski.

The statements which they had received having been somewhat rambling and confused, it was not immediately that the officers were able to understand what was going on. They were enlightened and put on the right track by a fusillade of shots proceeding from the neighborhood of the granite pedestal, and were for a moment frankly taken aback, as was an old gentleman who had followed them into the hotel with the idea of buying a cool-smoking twenty-cent cigar. With a peevish "What *is* this? The Alamo?" he walked out again, his purchase uncompleted.

Sergeant O'Toole, who was a man who noticed things, pointed at the pedestal and said, "That's him." His assistants nodded. The same idea had occurred to them.

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A sharp divergence of thought now existed between the upholders of the law and their prey. The upholders disliked the pedestal, considering it — correctly — an obstacle to the fulfilment of their hopes and dreams. The prey, on the other hand, was in favor of it. Questioned, he would have said that he was all for bigger and better pedestals.

Mr. McGee had for the moment no views on the matter. He was still sitting on the floor, immersed in astronomy. But as the stars ceased to revolve and he rose to his feet with the mists clearing from before his eyes, he joined the anti-pedestal school of thought. He regarded the pedestal frowningly, seeing it for what it was, a snag in the way of the happy ending, and when the Higgs-Stokes-Fitzpatrick-Cabot-Cork combination suddenly popped out from behind it and fired another salvo, he clicked his tongue in annoyance.

Then his eye fell on the marble globe, which was fair enough considering that it had just fallen on him, and he grunted contentedly.

Mr. McGee was a man who could reason. He did so now. If, he was saying to himself, a marble globe falling on his head had induced temporary anesthesia, surely similar results could be obtained by dropping it on the head — or heads — of Herbert Higgs, Percy Stokes, Otis Fitzpatrick, Chauncey Cabot, and Christopher Robin Cork. He proceeded to test this theory.

Unless you are a slave to duty, it is not a very pleasant task to creep up to a granite pedestal behind which is lurking a desperado with a gun, especially if this desperado has shown himself a man with a mania for leaping suddenly from his lair and shooting off that gun. But Mr. McGee, as it happened, was a slave to duty. His salary was not too lavish, but he believed in earning every cent of it. So now, when a lesser man might have decided that these things are best left to the police, sensitive fellows with a dislike for outside interference, he stole softly forward, holding the marble globe, and when he felt that he was within range he tossed the globe lightly in the air and it soared over the pedestal.

Justice generally prevails. The projectile might quite easily have missed Herbert Higgs altogether. It might merely have hit him on the toe, infuriating him further. Instead of which, falling like the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath, it established contact with the base of his skull. The welkin was shattered by a loud cry of agony. Herbert Higgs came staggering out and fell in a heap. Sergeant O'Toole, followed by Patrolmen McGinnis, Klein, and Zabriski, came racing up the stairs. And Mr. McGee, dusting his hands, returned to his seat in the lobby.

That night, when Mr. McGee got home to his snug little house in Astoria, he stood inside the front door, sniffing, and his wife called from the kitchen, "Is that you, John?" and he

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replied, "Yeah." He then proceeded to the kitchen and sniffed again.

"Pork?"

"Pork."

"Ah."

"Well," said Mrs. McGee. "Anything happen today?"

"Not a . . ."

Mr. McGee paused. A strange light had come into his face.

"Anything happen?" he cried. "I'll say something happened! Wait till I tell you. You won't believe this. Me sitting in the lobby. Along comes a dame. Drops her bag. I pick it up. 'Oh, thank you so much,' she says. 'Not at all, madam,' I say. Give you a thousand guesses, you'll never guess who it was. Right from the start seemed to me I'd seen her before somewheres, and I've just this minute got it. Minna Norcross."

"Minna *Norcross*?"

"Minna Norcross."

"Not *the* Minna Norcross?"

"Sure. Minna Norcross that married George Delacour and then she got a divorce and married Cyril Westmacott and they couldn't make a go of it and now she's married Spencer Halliday though I see where it says it's not expected to last. As close as I am to you now. Drops her bag. I pick it up. 'Oh, thank you so much,' she says. 'Not at all, madam,' I say. She'd got dark cheaters on, that's why I didn't recognize her. Cheese! If I'd known who it was I was picking up that bag for, you could have knocked me down with a feather."

"I can imagine."

"Remember her in *Painted Sinners*?"

"Ah."

"And *As A Man Sows*?"

"Ah."

"Minna Norcross. As close as I am to you now."

"Well!"

"Drops her bag. I pick it up. 'Oh, thank you so much,' she says. 'Not at all, madam,' I say."

"Well! I don't wonder you're all excited. Anything else happen today?"

"Not a thing," said Mr. McGee.

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## *CHARLES HONCE SELECTS . . .*

*Which are the twelve best detective short stories ever written? . . . You will recall that we asked a special panel of experts, consisting of James Hilton, Howard Haycraft, John Dickson Carr, Anthony Boucher, Vincent Starrett, James Sandoe, August Derleth, Viola Brothers Shore, Lee Wright, Lew D. Feldman, Charles Honce, and your Editors (serving as twelfth talesmen), to select the finest detective-crime short stories written in 109 years of larcenous literature — the* crème de la *crime, the best of all time. Among 83 tales nominated, twelve stories stood homicidal-head and sleuthian-shoulder above the others. Conscious of Charles Townsend Copeland's statement that "the question of the best [story] is likely to be as alluring as it is ultimately futile," and that Berton Braley was not altogether wrong when he maintained that "the best [stories] haven't been written," we nevertheless present, without 'tec timidity, the following as* THE GOLDEN DOZEN:

| | |
|---|---|
| The Hands of Mr. Ottermole | by Thomas Burke |
| The Purloined Letter | by Edgar A. Poe |
| The Red-Headed League | by A. Conan Doyle |
| The Avenging Chance | by Anthony Berkeley |
| The Absent-Minded Coterie | by Robert Barr |
| The Problem of Cell 13 | by Jacques Futrelle |
| The Oracle of the Dog | by G. K. Chesterton |
| Naboth's Vineyard | by Melville Davisson Post |
| The Gioconda Smile | by Aldous Huxley |
| The Yellow Slugs | by H. C. Bailey |
| The Genuine Tabard | by E. C. Bentley |
| Suspicion | by Dorothy L. Sayers |

*This month we bring you E. C. Bentley's "The Genuine Tabard," sponsored by Charles Honce who told us he would be grateful if we described him simply as "a New York newspaperman who has written many news stories on detective and mystery fiction for the press association with which he is connected." Mr. Honce considers himself strictly a nonprofessional who reads, reviews, and revels in detective stories "just for fun." He confesses to being an enthusiastic, loyal, and at times fanatical "fan" — but do not confuse the privileges of that position, he cautions us, with the prerogatives of a professional.*

*Well, perhaps Charles Honce is the eternal amateur. If so, he is the inspired dabbler, the glorified dilettante. Nor is his membership on our*



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*jury of experts less valuable for a' that. Indeed, his presence is all the more important, for Charles Honce represents the "constant reader" — he represents YOU.*

*Although Mr. Honce has asked us not to mix his public and private lives, we feel that we can give you a little of his background without violating his privacy. He was born in a famous American town — Keokuk, Iowa; his wife is a charming and gracious woman, and her given name has always fascinated us — it is Emmanuella; during a newspaper career that is now nearly forty years young, Mr. Honce has been a reporter, sports editor, city editor, news editor, and Sunday editor with one of the largest news services in the world. He is a member of the Bibliographical Society of America, the Mark Twain Research Foundation, the Baker Street Irregulars, the Kentucky Colonels Association, and the Dutch Treat Club. And he is one regular guy.*

*His list of favorite detective short stories is, in his own words, "a curious assortment." The stories are consistently those "which stick in my mind" — the acid test, involving taste, time, and perspective. It would appear (again quoting Mr. Honce) that he is more interested in "atmosphere" than in plot. Here are Mr. Honce's selections:*

The Genuine Tabard.....by E. C. Bentley
The Empty House.....by A. Conan Doyle
The Corpus Delicti.....by Melville Davisson Post
The Long Dinner.....by H. C. Bailey
In the Fog.....by Richard Harding Davis
The Infallible Godahl.....by Frederick Irving Anderson
A Transient Guest.....by Edgar Saltus
A Passage to Benares.....by T. S. Stribling
The Lamp of God.....by Ellery Queen
The Suicide Club.....by Robert Louis Stevenson
The Flitterbat Lancers.....by Arthur Morrison
Man Who Liked Dickens....by Evelyn Waugh

*Mr. Honce believes that* TRENT INTERVENES, *the volume in which "The Genuine Tabard" first appeared, is "one of the most urbane and satisfying books of short detective stories ever put together." In the matter of E. C. Bentley's two detective novels, the classic* TRENT'S LAST CASE *and the later book written in collaboration with H. Warner Allen,* TRENT'S OWN CASE, *Mr. Honce casts a minority vote: he much prefers the second. But few — experts or readers — will quarrel with Charles Honce's choice among the short stories about Philip Trent.*



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# THE GENUINE TABARD

*by E. C. BENTLEY*

IT WAS quite by chance, at a dinner-party given by the American Naval Attaché, that Philip Trent met the Langleys, who were visiting Europe for the first time. During the cocktail-time, before dinner was served, he had gravitated towards George D. Langley, because he was the finest-looking man in the room — tall, strongly-built, carrying his years lightly, pink of face, with vigorous, massive features and thick gray hair.

They had talked about the Tower of London, the Cheshire Cheese, and the Zoo, all of which the Langleys had visited that day. Langley, so the Attaché had told Trent, was a distant relative of his own; he had made a large fortune manufacturing engineers' drawing-office equipment, was a prominent citizen of Cordova, Ohio, the headquarters of his business, and had married a Schuyler. Trent, though not sure what a Schuyler was, gathered that it was an excellent thing to marry, and this impression was confirmed when he found himself placed next to Mrs. Langley at dinner.

Mrs. Langley always went on the assumption that her own affairs were the most interesting subject of conversation; and as she was a vivacious and humorous talker and a very handsome and good-hearted woman, she usually turned out to be right. She informed Trent that she was crazy about old churches, of which she had seen and photographed she did not know how many in France, Germany, and England. Trent, who loved Thirteenth-Century stained glass, mentioned Chartres, which Mrs. Langley said, truly enough, was too perfect for words. He asked if she had been to Fairford in Gloucestershire. She had; and that was, she declared with emphasis, the greatest day of all their time in Europe; not because of the church, though that was certainly lovely, but because of the treasure they had found that afternoon.

Trent asked to be told about this; and Mrs. Langley said that it was quite a story. Mr. Gifford had driven them down to Fairford in his car. Did Trent know Mr. Gifford — W. N. Gifford, who lived at the Suffolk Hotel? He was visiting Paris just now. Trent ought to meet him, because Mr. Gifford knew everything there was to know about stained glass, and church ornaments, and brasses, and antiques in general. They had met him when he was sketching some traceries in Westminster Abbey, and they had become great friends. He had driven them about to quite a few places within reach of London. He knew all about Fairford, of course, and they had a lovely time there.

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On the way back to London, after passing through Abingdon, Mr. Gifford had said it was time for a cup of coffee, as he always did around five o'clock; he made his own coffee, which was excellent, and carried it in a thermos. They slowed down, looking for a good place to stop, and Mrs. Langley's eye was caught by a strange name on a signpost at a turning off the road — something Episcopi. She knew that meant bishops, which was interesting; so she asked Mr. Gifford to halt the car while she made out the weather-beaten lettering. The sign said "Silcote Episcopi ½ mile."

Had Trent heard of the place? Neither had Mr. Gifford. But that lovely name, Mrs. Langley said, was enough for her. There must be a church, and an old one; and anyway she would love to have Silcote Episcopi in her collection. As it was so near, she asked Mr. Gifford if they could go there so she could take a few snaps while the light was good, and perhaps have coffee there.

They found the church, with the parsonage nearby, and a village in sight some way beyond. The church stood back of the churchyard, and as they were going along the footpath they noticed a grave with tall railings around it; not a standing-up stone but a flat one, raised on a little foundation. They noticed it because, though it was an old stone, it had not been just left to fall into decay, but had been kept clean of moss and dirt, so you could make out the inscription, and the grass around it was trim and tidy. They read Sir Rowland Verey's epitaph; and Mrs. Langley — so she assured Trent — screamed with joy.

There was a man trimming the churchyard boundary-hedge with shears, who looked at them, she thought, suspiciously when she screamed. She thought he was probably the sexton; so she assumed a winning manner, and asked him if there was any objection to her taking a photograph of the inscription on the stone. The man said that he didn't know as there was; but maybe she ought to ask vicar, because it was his grave, in a manner of speaking. It was vicar's great-grandfather's grave, that was; and he always had it kep' in good order. He would be in the church now, if they had a mind to see him.

Mr. Gifford said that in any case they would have a look at the church, which he thought might be worth the trouble. He observed that it was not very old — about mid-Seventeenth century, he would say — a poor little kid church, Mrs. Langley commented with gay sarcasm. In a place so named, Mr. Gifford said, there had probably been a church for centuries farther back; but it might have been burned down, or fallen into ruin, and replaced by this building. So they went into the church; and at once Mr. Gifford had been delighted with it. He pointed out how the pulpit, the screen, the pews, the glass, the organ-case in the west gallery, were all of the same period. Mrs. Langley was busy with her camera when a pleasant-faced man of middle age, in

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clerical attire, emerged from the vestry with a book under his arm.

Mr. Gifford introduced himself and his friends as a party of chance visitors who had been struck by the beauty of the church and had ventured to explore its interior. Could the vicar tell them anything about the armorial glass in the nave windows? The vicar could and did; but Mrs. Langley was not just then interested in any family history but the vicar's own, and soon she broached the subject of his great-grandfather's gravestone.

The vicar, smiling, said that he bore Sir Rowland's name, and had felt it a duty to look after the grave properly, as this was the only Verey to be buried in that place. He added that the living was in the gift of the head of the family, and that he was the third Verey to be vicar of Silcote Episcopi in the course of two hundred years. He said that Mrs. Langley was most welcome to take a photograph of the stone, but he doubted if it could be done successfully with a hand-camera from over the railings — and of course, said Mrs. Langley, he was perfectly right. Then the vicar asked if she would like to have a copy of the epitaph, which he could write for her if they would all come over to his house, and his wife would give them some tea; and at this, as Trent could imagine, they were just tickled to death.

"But what was it, Mrs. Langley, that delighted you so much about the epitaph?" Trent asked. "It seems to have been about a Sir Rowland Verey — that's all I have been told so far."

"I was going to show it to you," Mrs. Langley said, opening her handbag. "Maybe you will not think it so precious as we do. I have had a lot of copies made, to send to friends at home." She unfolded a small typed sheet, on which Trent read what follows:

Within this Vault are interred
the Remains of
Lt.-Gen. Sir Rowland Edmund Verey,
Garter Principal King of Arms,
Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod
and
Clerk of the Hanaper,
who departed this Life
on the 2nd May 1795
in the 73rd Year of his Age
calmly relying
on the Merits of the Redeemer
for the Salvation of
his Soul.
Also of Lavinia Prudence,
Wife of the Above,
who entered into Rest
on the 12th March 1799
in the 68th Year of her Age.
She was a Woman of fine Sense,
genteel Behaviour,
prudent Oeconomy
and
great Integrity.
"This is the Gate of the Lord:
The Righteous shall enter into it."

"You have certainly got a fine specimen of that style," Trent observed. "Nowadays we don't run to much more, as a rule, than 'in loving

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memory,' followed by the essential facts. As for the titles, I don't wonder at your admiring them; they are like the sound of trumpets. There is also a faint jingle of money, I think. In Sir Rowland's time, Black Rod's was probably a job worth having; and though I don't know what a Hanaper is, I do remember that its Clerkship was one of the fat sinecures that made it well worthwhile being a courtier."

Mrs. Langley put away her treasure, patting the bag with affection. "Mr. Gifford said the Clerk had to collect some sort of legal fees for the Crown, and that he would draw maybe seven or eight thousand pounds a year for it, paying another man two or three hundred for doing the actual work. Well, we found the vicarage just perfect — an old house with everything beautifully mellow and personal about it. There was a long oar hanging on the wall in the hall, and when I asked about it the vicar said he had rowed for All Souls College when he was at Oxford. His wife was charming, too. And now listen! While she was giving us tea, and her husband was making a copy of the epitaph for me, he was talking about his ancestor, and he said the first duty that Sir Rowland had to perform after his appointment as King of Arms was to proclaim the Peace of Versailles from the steps of the Palace of St. James's. Imagine that, Mr. Trent!"

Trent looked at her uncertainly. "So they had a Peace of Versailles all that time ago."

"Yes, they did," Mrs. Langley said, a little tartly. "And quite an important Peace, at that. We remember it in America, if you don't. It was the first treaty to be signed by the United States, and in that treaty the British Government took a licking, called off the war, and recognized our independence. Now when the vicar said that about his ancestor having proclaimed peace with the United States, I saw George Langley prick up his ears; and I knew why.

"You see, George is a collector of Revolution pieces, and he has some pretty nice things, if I do say it. He began asking questions; and the first thing anybody knew, the vicaress had brought down the old King of Arms's tabard and was showing it off. You know what a tabard is, Mr. Trent, of course. Such a lovely garment! I fell for it on the spot, and as for George, his eyes stuck out like a crab's. That wonderful shade of red satin, and the Royal Arms embroidered in those stunning colors, red and gold and blue and silver, as you rarely see them.

"Presently George got talking to Mr. Gifford in a corner, and I could see Mr. Gifford screwing up his mouth and shaking his head; but George only stuck out his chin, and soon after, when the vicaress was showing off the garden, he got the vicar by himself and talked turkey.

"Mr. Verey didn't like it at all, George told me; but George can be a very smooth worker when he likes, and at last the vicar had to allow that he was tempted, what with having his sons to start in the world, and the

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income tax being higher than a cat's back, and the death duties and all. And finally he said yes. I won't tell you or anybody what George offered him, Mr. Trent, because George swore me to secrecy; but, as he says, it was no good acting like a piker in this kind of a deal, and he could sense that the vicar wouldn't stand for any bargaining back and forth. And anyway, it was worth every cent of it to George, to have something that no other curio-hunter possessed. He said he would come for the tabard next day and bring the money in notes, and the vicar said very well, then we must all three come to lunch, and he would have a paper ready giving the history of the tabard over his signature. So that was what we did; and the tabard is in our suite at the Greville, locked in a wardrobe, and George has it out and gloats over it first thing in the morning."

Trent said with sincerity that no story of real life had ever interested him more. "I wonder," he said, "if your husband would let me have a look at his prize. I'm not much of an antiquary, but I am interested in heraldry, and the only tabards I have ever seen were quite modern ones."

"Why, of course," Mrs. Langley said. "You make a date with him after dinner. He will be delighted. He has no idea of hiding it under a bushel!"

The following afternoon, in the Langleys' sitting-room at the Greville, the tabard was displayed on a coat-hanger before the thoughtful gaze of Trent, while its new owner looked on with a pride touched with anxiety.

"Well, Mr. Trent," he said. "How do you like it? You don't doubt this is a genuine tabard, I suppose?"

Trent rubbed his chin. "Oh, yes, it's a tabard. I have seen a few before, and I have painted one, with a man inside it, when Richmond Herald wanted his portrait done in the complete get-up. Everything about it is right. Such things are hard to come by. Until recent times, I believe, a herald's tabard remained his property, and stayed in the family, and if they got hard up they might perhaps sell it privately, as this was sold to you. It's different now — so Richmond Herald told me. When a herald dies, his tabard goes back to the College of Arms, where he got it from."

Langley drew a breath of relief. "I'm glad to hear you say my tabard is genuine. When you asked me if you could see it, I got the impression you thought there might be something phoney about it."

Mrs. Langley, her keen eyes on Trent's face, shook her head. "He thinks so still, George, I believe. Isn't that so, Mr. Trent?"

"Yes, I am sorry to say it is. You see, this was sold to you as a particular tabard, with an interesting history of its own; and when Mrs. Langley described it to me, I felt pretty sure that you had been swindled. You see, she had noticed nothing odd about the Royal Arms. I wanted to see it just to make sure. It certainly did not belong to Garter King of Arms in the year 1783."

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A very ugly look wiped all the benevolence from Langley's face, and it grew several shades more pink. "If what you say is true, Mr. Trent, and if that old fraud was playing me for a sucker, I will get him jailed if it's my last act. But it certainly is hard to believe — a preacher — and belonging to one of your best families — settled in that lovely, peaceful old place, with his flock to look after. Are you really sure of what you say?"

"What I know is that the Royal Arms on this tabard are all wrong."

An exclamation came from the lady. "Why, Mr. Trent, how you talk! We have seen the Royal Arms quite a few times, and they are just the same as this — and you have told us it is a genuine tabard, anyway. I don't get this at all."

"I must apologize," Trent said unhappily, "for the Royal Arms. You see, they have a past. In the Fourteenth Century Edward III laid claim to the Kingdom of France, and it took a hundred years of war to convince his descendants that that claim wasn't practical politics. All the same, they went on including the lilies of France in the Royal Arms, and they never dropped them until the beginning of the Nineteenth Century."

"Mercy!" Mrs. Langley's voice was faint.

"Besides that, the first four Georges and the fourth William were Kings of Hanover; so until Queen Victoria came along, and could not inherit Hanover because she was a female, the Arms of the House of Brunswick were jammed in along with our own. In fact, the tabard of the Garter King of Arms in the year when he proclaimed the peace with the United States of America was a horrible mess of the leopards of England, the lion of Scotland, the harp of Ireland, the lilies of France, together with a few more lions, and a white horse, and some hearts, as worn in Hanover. It was a fairly tight fit for one shield, but they managed it somehow — and you can see that the Arms on this tabard of yours are not nearly such a bad dream as that. It is a Victorian tabard — a nice, gentlemanly coat, such as no well-dressed herald should be without."

Langley thumped the table. "Well, I intend to be without it, anyway, if I can get my money back."

"We can but try," Trent said. "It may be possible. But the reason why I asked to be allowed to see this thing, Mr. Langley, was that I thought I might be able to save you some unpleasantness. You see, if you went home with your treasure, and showed it to people, and talked about its history, and it was mentioned in the newspapers, and then somebody got inquiring into its authenticity, and found out what I have been telling you, and made it public — well, it wouldn't be very nice for you."

Langley flushed again, and a significant glance passed between him and his wife.

"You're darn right, it wouldn't," he said. "And I know the name of the buzzard who would do that to me,

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too, as soon as I had gone the limit in making a monkey of myself. Why, I would lose the money twenty times over, and then a bundle, rather than have that happen to me. I am grateful to you, Mr. Trent — I am indeed. I'll say frankly that at home we aim to be looked up to socially, and we judged that we would certainly figure if we brought this doggoned thing back and had it talked about. Gosh! When I think — but never mind that now. The thing is to go right back to that old crook and make him squeal. I'll have my money out of him, if I have to use a can-opener."

Trent shook his head. "I don't feel very sanguine about that, Mr. Langley. But how would you like to run down to his place tomorrow with me and a friend of mine, who takes an interest in affairs of this kind, and who would be able to help you?"

Langley said, with emphasis, that that suited him.

The car which called for Langley next morning did not look as if it belonged, but did belong, to Scotland Yard; and the same could be said of its dapper chauffeur. Inside was Trent, with a black-haired, round-faced man whom he introduced as Superintendent Owen. It was at his request that Langley, during the journey, told with as much detail as he could recall the story of his acquisition of the tabard, which he had hopefully brought with him in a suitcase.

A few miles short of Abingdon the chauffeur was told to go slow. "You tell me it was not very far this side of Abingdon, Mr. Langley, that you turned off the main road," the superintendent said. "If you will keep a look-out now, you might be able to point out the spot."

Langley stared at him. "Why, doesn't your man have a map?"

"Yes; but there isn't any place called Silcote Episcopi on his map."

"Nor," Trent added, "on any other map. No, I am not suggesting that you dreamed it all; but the fact is so."

Langley, remarking shortly that this beat him, glared out of the window eagerly; and soon he gave the word to stop. "I am pretty sure this is the turning," he said. "I recognize it by these two haystacks in the meadow, and the pond with osiers over it. But there certainly was a signpost there, and now there isn't one. If I was not dreaming then, I guess I must be now." And as the car ran swiftly down the side-road he went on, "Yes; that certainly is the church on ahead — and the covered gate, and the graveyard — and there is the vicarage, with the yew trees and the garden and everything. Well, gentlemen, right now is when he gets what is coming to him. I don't care what the name of the darn place is."

"The name of the darn place on the map," Trent said, "is Oakhanger."

The three men got out and passed through the lych-gate.

"Where is the gravestone?" Trent asked.

Langley pointed. "Right there."

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They went across to the railed-in grave, and the American put a hand to his head. "I must be nuts!" he groaned. "I *know* this is the grave — but it says that here is laid to rest the body of James Roderick Stevens."

"Who seems to have died about thirty years after Sir Rowland Verey," Trent remarked, studying the inscription; while the superintendent gently smote his thigh in an ecstasy of silent admiration. "And now let us see if the vicar can throw any light on the subject."

They went on to the parsonage; and a dark-haired, bright-faced girl, opening the door at Mr. Owen's ring, smiled recognizingly at Langley. "Well, you're genuine, anyway!" he exclaimed. "Ellen is what they call you, isn't it? And you remember me, I see. Now I feel better. We would like to see the vicar. Is he at home?"

"The canon came home two days ago, sir," the girl said, with a perceptible stress on the term of rank. "He is down in the village now; but he may be back any minute. Would you like to wait for him?"

"We surely would," Langley declared positively; and they were shown into the large room where the tabard had changed hands.

"So he has been away from home?" Trent asked. "And he is a canon?"

"Canon Maberley, sir; yes, sir, he was in Italy for a month. The lady and gentleman who were here till last week had taken the house furnished while he was away. Me and cook stayed on to do for them."

"And did that gentleman — Mr. Verey — do the canon's duty during his absence?" Trent inquired with a ghost of a smile.

"No, sir; the canon had an arrangement with Mr. Giles, the vicar of Cotmore, about that. The canon never knew that Mr. Verey was a clergyman. He never saw him. You see, it was Mrs. Verey who came to see the place and she settled everything; and it seems she never mentioned it. When we told the canon, after they had gone, he was quite took aback. 'I can't make it out at all,' he says. 'Why should he conceal it?' he says. 'Well, sir,' I says, 'they was very nice people, anyhow, and the friends they had to see them here was very nice, and their chauffeur was a perfectly respectable man,' I says."

Trent nodded. "Ah! They had friends to see them."

The girl was thoroughly enjoying this gossip. "Oh, yes, sir. The gentleman as brought you down, sir" — she turned to Langley — "he brought down several others before that. They was Americans too, I think."

"You mean they didn't have an English accent, I suppose," Langley suggested dryly.

"Yes, sir; and they had such nice manners, like yourself," the girl said, quite unconscious of Langley's confusion, and of the grins covertly exchanged between Trent and the superintendent, who now took up the running.

"This respectable chauffeur of theirs — was he a small, thin man with a

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long nose, partly bald, always smoking cigarettes?"

"Oh, yes, sir; just like that. You must know him."

"I do," Superintendent Owen said grimly.

"So do I!" Langley exclaimed. "He was the man we spoke to in the churchyard."

"Did Mr. and Mrs. Verey have any — er — ornaments of their own with them?" the superintendent asked.

Ellen's eyes rounded with enthusiasm. "Oh, yes, sir — some lovely things they had. But they was only put out when they had friends coming. Other times they was kept somewhere in Mr. Verey's bedroom, I think. Cook and me thought perhaps they was afraid of burglars."

The superintendent pressed a hand over his stubby mustache. "Yes, I expect that was it," he said gravely. "But what kind of lovely things do you mean? Silver — that sort of thing?"

"No, sir; nothing ordinary, as you might say. One day they had out a beautiful goblet, like, all gold, with little figures and patterns worked on it in colors, and precious stones, blue and green and white, stuck all round it — regular dazzled me to look at."

"The Debenham Chalice!" exclaimed the superintendent.

"Is it a well-known thing, then, sir?" the girl asked.

"No, not at all," Mr. Owen said. "It is an heirloom — a private family possession. Only we happen to have heard of it."

"Fancy taking such things about with them," Ellen remarked. "Ther there was a big book they had out once, lying open on that table in the window. It was all done in funny gold letters on yellow paper, with lovely little pictures all round the edges, gold and silver and all colors."

"The Murrane Psalter!" said Mr. Owen. "Come, we're getting on."

"And," the girl pursued, addressing herself to Langley, "there was that beautiful red coat with the arms on it, like you see on a half-crown. You remember they got it out for you to look at, sir; and when I brought in the tea it was hanging up in front of the tallboy."

Langley grimaced. "I believe I do remember it," he said, "now you remind me."

"There is the canon coming up the path now," Ellen said, with a glance through the window. "I will tell him you gentlemen are here."

She hurried from the room, and soon there entered a tall, stooping old man with a gentle face and the indescribable air of a scholar.

The superintendent went to meet him.

"I am a police officer, Canon Maberley," he said. "I and my friends have called to see you in pursuit of an official inquiry in connection with the people to whom your house was let last month. I do not think I shall have to trouble you much, though, because your parlormaid has given us already most of the information we are likely to get, I suspect."

"Ah! That girl," the canon said

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vaguely. "She has been talking to you, has she? She will go on talking forever, if you let her. Please sit down, gentlemen. About the Vereys — ah, yes! But surely there was nothing wrong about the Vereys? Mrs. Verey was quite a nice, well-bred person, and they left the place in perfectly good order. They paid me in advance, too, because they live in New Zealand, as she explained, and know nobody in London. They were on a visit to England, and they wanted a temporary home in the heart of the country, because that is the real England, as she said. That was so sensible of them, I thought — instead of flying to the grime and turmoil of London, as most of our friends from overseas do. In a way, I was quite touched by it, and I was glad to let them have the vicarage."

The superintendent shook his head. "People as clever as they are make things very difficult for us, sir. And the lady never mentioned that her husband was a clergyman, I understand."

"No, and that puzzled me when I heard of it," the canon said. "But it didn't matter, and no doubt there was a reason."

"The reason was, I think," Mr. Owen said, "that if she had mentioned it, you might have been too much interested, and asked questions which would have been all right for a genuine parson's wife, but which she couldn't answer without putting her foot in it. Her husband could do a vicar well enough to pass with laymen, especially if they were not English laymen. I am sorry to say, canon, that your tenants were impostors. Their name was certainly not Verey, to begin with. I don't know who they are — I wish I did — they are new to us and they have invented a new method. But I can tell you what they are. They are thieves and swindlers."

The canon fell back in his chair. "Thieves and swindlers!" he gasped.

"And very talented performers too," Trent assured him. "Why, they have had in this house of yours part of the loot of several country-house burglaries which took place last year, and which puzzled the police because it seemed impossible that some of the things taken could ever be turned into cash. One of them was a herald's tabard, which Superintendent Owen tells me had been worn by the father of Sir Andrew Ritchie. He was Maltravers Herald in his day. It was taken when Sir Andrew's place in Lincolnshire was broken into, and a lot of very valuable jewelry was stolen. It was dangerous to try to sell the tabard in the open market, and it was worth little, anyhow, apart from any associations it might have. What they did was to fake up a story about the tabard which might appeal to an American purchaser, and having found a victim, to induce him to buy it. I believe he parted with a large sum."

"The poor simp!" growled Langley.

Canon Maberley held up a shaking hand. "I fear I do not understand," he said. "What had their taking my house to do with all this?"

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"It was a vital part of the plan. We know exactly how they went to work about the tabard; and no doubt the other things were got rid of in very much the same way. There were four of them in the gang. Besides your tenants, there was an agreeable and cultured person — I should think a man with real knowledge of antiquities and objects of art — whose job was to make the acquaintance of wealthy people visiting London, gain their confidence, take them about to places of interest, exchange hospitality with them, and finally get them down to this vicarage. In this case it was made to appear as if the proposal to look over your church came from the visitors themselves. They could not suspect anything. They were attracted by the romantic name of the place on a signpost up there at the corner of the main road."

The canon shook his head helplessly. "But there is no signpost at that corner."

"No, but there was one at the time when they were due to be passing that corner in the confederate's car. It was a false signpost, you see, with a false name on it — so that if anything went wrong, the place where the swindle was worked would be difficult to trace. Then, when they entered the churchyard their attention was attracted by a certain gravestone with an inscription that interested them. I won't waste your time by giving the whole story — the point is that the gravestone, or rather the top layer which had been fitted onto it, was false too. The sham inscription on it was meant to lead up to the swindle."

The canon drew himself up in his chair. "It was an abominable act of sacrilege!" he exclaimed. "The man calling himself Verey ——"

"I don't think," Trent said, "it was the man calling himself Verey who actually did the abominable act. We believe it was the fourth member of the gang, who masqueraded as the Vereys' chauffeur — a very interesting character. Superintendent Owen can tell you about him."

Mr. Owen twisted his mustache thoughtfully. "Yes; he is the only one of them that we can place. Alfred Coveney, his name is; a man of some education and any amount of talent. He used to be a stage-carpenter and property-maker — a regular artist, he was. Give him a tub of papier-mâché, and there was nothing he couldn't model and color to look exactly like the real thing. That was how the false top to the gravestone was made, I've no doubt. It may have been made to fit on like a lid, to be slipped on and off as required. The inscription was a bit above Alf, though — I expect it was Gifford who drafted that for him, and he copied the lettering from other old stones in the churchyard. Of course the fake signpost was Alf's work too — stuck up when required, and taken down when the show was over.

"Well, Alf got into bad company. They found how clever he was with his hands, and he became an expert burglar. He has served two terms of

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imprisonment. He is one of a few who have always been under suspicion for the job at Sir Andrew Ritchie's place, and the other two when the chalice was lifted from Eynsham Park and the Psalter from Lord Swanbourne's house. With the jewelry that was taken in all three burglaries, they must have done very well indeed for themselves; and by this time they are going to be hard to catch."

Canon Maberley, who had now recovered himself somewhat, looked at the others with the beginnings of a smile. "It is a new experience for me," he said, "to be made use of by a gang of criminals. But it is highly interesting. I suppose that when these confiding strangers had been got down here, my tenant appeared in the character of the parson, and invited them into the house, where you tell me they were induced to make a purchase of stolen property. I do not see, I must confess, how anything could have been better designed to prevent any possibility of suspicion arising. The vicar of a parish, at home in his own vicarage! Who could imagine anything being wrong? Yes, the deception was well carried out."

"As far as I know," Trent said, "he made only one mistake. It was a small one; but the moment I heard it I knew that he must have been a fraud. You see, he was asked about the oar you have hanging up in the hall. I didn't go to Oxford myself, but I believe when a man is given his oar it means that he rowed in an eight that did something unusually good."

A light came into the canon's spectacled eyes. "In the year I got my colors the Wadham boat went up five places on the river. It was the happiest week of my life."

"Yet you had other triumphs," Trent suggested. "For instance, didn't you get a Fellowship at All Souls, after leaving Wadham?"

"Yes, and that did please me, naturally," the canon said. "But that is a different sort of happiness, my dear sir, and, believe me, nothing like so keen. And by the way, how did you know about that?"

"I thought it might be so, because of the little mistake your tenant made. When he was asked about the oar, he said he had rowed for All Souls."

Canon Maberley burst out laughing, while Langley and the superintendent stared at him blankly.

"I think I see what happened," he said. "The rascal must have been browsing about in my library, in search of ideas for the part he was to play. I was a resident Fellow for five years, and a number of my books have a bookplate with my name and the name and arms of All Souls. His mistake was natural." And again the old gentleman laughed delightedly.

Langley exploded. "I like a joke myself," he said, "but I'll be skinned alive if I can see the point of this one."

"Why, the point is," Trent told him, "that nobody ever rowed for All Souls. There never were more than four undergraduates there at one time, all the other members being Fellows."

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## *101st ANNIVERSARY*

*Edgar Allan Poe died on the morning of October 7, 1849, at Washington College Hospital, Baltimore. This issue of EQMM goes on sale the morning of October 7, 1950 — one hundred and one years to the day after the death of the Father of the Detective Story. Last year we commemorated the anniversary of Poe's death by devoting most of the November 1949 issue to Poe's life, work, and influence. This year we cannot do more than remind you of the 101st anniversary, and offer one story dedicated to the memory of that "finest of finest of artists" (George Bernard Shaw's evaluation of one of America's greatest literary geniuses) . . . At the end of the summer of 1949 Miriam Allen deFord got an inspiration. It came to her in a flash — if Dr. Sam: Johnson can be a detective, why not Poe? Indeed, she asked herself in a fever of anticipation, who among all the people who ever lived and breathed, has the better right to be a fictional detective? Now, Miss deFord, as you perhaps know, has been a Poe student for many years; she is thoroughly familiar with his life, personality, and work. So, there came into being "The Mystery of the Vanished Brother," in which Poe applies his own theories of ratiocination to another "real-life" problem.*

*You will recall further that the story which won first prize in EQMM's 1949 contest was John Dickson Carr's "The Gentleman from Paris" (published in the April 1950 issue), and that the main point of this story was the revelation at the end that the detective was Edgar Allan Poe himself. What an amazing coincidence that Mr. Carr and Miss deFord should both conceive of Poe as a detective at approximately the same time! And write stories about Poe one on the heels of the other! And yet, on further consideration, it is not amazing at all: what is really amazing is that no one thought of doing it before! But in justice to Miss deFord we should make absolutely clear that when she wrote her story she had no idea that John Dickson Carr had already completed his and had sent it in to EQMM'S 1949 contest. When we told Miss deFord about it, she wrote to us: "Isn't that just my luck? Why didn't I get the idea a year ago? I certainly hope that your readers won't think that I read Mr. Carr's story and then decided to imitate it!"*

*No, Miss deFord could not have read the Carr story until at least seven months after she had finished her own. Besides, any reader who is familiar with Miss deFord's stories — "Mortmain," "Something to Do With*



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*Figures,*" "*Beyond the Sea of Death,*" "'*I Murdered a Man,*'" *just to mention a few — knows Miriam Allen deFord as one of the most original-minded, uniquely-creative talents in the history of the detective short story.*

*Now, visit that slender, sensitive young man, with "the pale face, the wavy brown hair, the crooked smile under the little mustache . . . and above all, the dark, luminous eyes" — as he might have looked and acted had he once been your next-door neighbor, living in a little house with a picket fence and a garden . . .*

# THE MYSTERY OF THE VANISHED BROTHER

*by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD*

It was almost eight o'clock, but on this June evening it was not yet dark. Clara paused at the gate in the picket fence, summoning her courage. She had hoped that perhaps he would be in the garden, where she had seen him so often, but the garden was empty. Shrugging her shoulders under her light shawl, she opened the gate and stepped briskly up to the low doorstep.

The old lady opened to her knock, a man's sock which she had been darning still in her hand. She gazed inquiringly at Clara without a word. The girl's first attempt came out as an awkward croak. Blushing, she cleared her throat and tried again.

"Is Mr. Poe at home? May I speak to him on an urgent matter?"

"He's here," said Mrs. Clemm drily, and led the way into the living room, beyond whose open door Clara glimpsed a kitchen where the supper dishes still sat unwashed on the table. The walls of the living room were whitewashed; the room was sparsely furnished, but clean and very neat. Clara's eyes searched for the harp, whose tones she had heard so often as she passed up Seventh Street by the house, but it was not to be seen. Perhaps, now that Virginia was too ill to play it, it had found its way to a pawnshop, as had so much else from the little house.

"Pray sit down," said Mrs. Clemm. "Eddie is upstairs, looking after Virginia. My daughter is not well enough at present to leave her bed very often." She sighed. "Have we met, madam? I don't recall you. What was it that you wished to see my son about?"

"We haven't met," said Clara in a low voice, her fingers playing nervously with her bonnet-strings, "but we are neighbors. My name is Clara Vivian. We live — my mother, my brother, and I — on Callowhill Street, not far from Eighth. You have doubtless seen me sometimes passing your



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house, or at the market; I have often seen you, though we have never met."

"And what is your business with my son?"

She calls him her son — he is her nephew and her son-in-law, Clara thought confusedly. Aloud, she said:

"Oh, Mrs. Clemm, I am in great trouble."

The old lady sat and waited. Her busy hands were at work once more on the sock she was darning.

"You must think it strange," the girl faltered, "that I call thus on a gentleman with whom I have no acquaintance — without an escort — in the evening, even though it is not yet dark. I assure you I am not in the habit of flouting conventions — I am no Bohemian —"

"As we are?"

Clara blushed hotly. "Indeed, I did not mean that, please believe me! I had no idea — I didn't think —"

"Everyone in this neighborhood doubtless knows that occasionally my poor son is the worse for drink," Mrs. Clemm murmured. "He has indeed enough reason for it, poor boy. Everyone knows that we are desperately poor, and that such associations as we have are with the denizens of the world of literature and the theater, who are not noted for their conventionality. So what am I to think when a strange young lady inquires at my door for my son, whom she confesses she does not know, and by way of explanation says only that she is in great trouble? . . . Oh, my poor child, don't cry! I had no intention of —"

"My brother has vanished!" Clara sobbed. "I have come to ask Mr. Poe to tell me what has happened to him."

A light step sounded on the stair. Clara looked up through her tears at the man who entered. The pale face, the wavy brown hair, the crooked smile under the little mustache, the slight, athletic figure — and above all, the dark, luminous eyes — were somehow reassuring. So was the musical voice in which he said:

"Why, what is this? Your brother has vanished? Who is your brother, my dear young lady, and why should I know where he has gone?"

Clara wiped her own eyes and essayed a smile.

"You both think me a romantic fool, I am afraid. But I have been in such torment all day — ever since yesterday afternoon — and suddenly I thought of you, Mr. Poe, and hoped you might be my salvation. I have so much admired your stories — I have read all that I could find and have been so much impressed by your ability to solve every problem presented to you —"

"It is true that I have offered to solve any cryptogram sent me — but a vanished brother is scarcely a cryptogram, madam."

"I am Clara Vivian. I meant such problems as the one you solved in your *Mystery of Marie Rogêt*, which I read in 'The Ladies' Companion.' I thought — I hoped — that you might aid me in finding my brother, wherever — whatever has happened to him."

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"Tell me about it, Miss Vivian."

He drew up a chair opposite the sofa on which she sat. Mrs. Clemm lighted a lamp on the table, then another in the kitchen, where she began quietly to wash the dishes.

"Yesterday afternoon before three o'clock my brother left our house. He was to go to the bank for my mother, then to make some purchases for her, and to return for supper by six o'clock. He has not come home since, and there has been no word from him."

"But surely, a grown man may be absent from home for a day or so without occasioning such anxiety?"

"My brother is not yet eighteen, Mr. Poe. He has never before done such a thing. And it is not as if —"

"As if he had been visiting the bars and had become incapable. Yes, I can see that. Might he merely be visiting friends?"

"Early this morning I called on everyone I could think of. No one had seen him or heard from him."

"But what do your parents say? If they feel no concern —"

"My father is dead. My mother is an invalid; she is not bed-ridden, but she keeps to her room. She does not know my brother is missing. I have been able so far to tell her that he has caught a bad cold, and therefore does not wish to infect her by making his usual twice-a-day visit to her. But I shall not be able to deceive her much longer.

"My brother is a student at your own college, Mr. Poe, the University of Virginia. He is at home for his summer holidays. He has no college friends here — he is the only Philadelphian in his class. We have been fatherless since he was six and I was nine, and he has always been the most devoted of sons and brothers. My mother has never had a moment's worry over him, and he is strongly attached to us both . . . So you see there is no reason for me to think that he has run away from us. We have had no dispute, and in fact we were engaged to go to a concert together this very evening."

"You say he was intending to visit the bank for your mother?"

"That is the thing I have dreaded saying. When he left home, he had over $200 on his person. He had collected the rents of a number of houses my mother owns, and this was the money he was to deposit."

Poe whistled soundlessly.

"This, my dear Miss Vivian," he said firmly, "is a matter for the constables."

"Oh, no — I beg of you! That is just what I must avoid. If my mother had to know, I am afraid it would kill her. It is her heart which is weak, and we keep all shocks and worries from her."

"But if — let us face it — anything untoward has happened to your brother —"

"Yes, I know; then I should have to tell her and face the consequences. But if you, with that power of deduction you possess, could consider the situation — if you could ascertain by pure reasoning where my brother

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must be, so that I could go and bring him home with me — she need never be the wiser. The police would surely call on her at once, question her, and perhaps kill her outright."

"Have you considered that by delaying thus you may be endangering your brother's life? I shall not hide the truth from you, Miss Vivian; my first belief must be that someone has waylaid your brother — what is his name?"

"Tom. Thomas Vivian."

"That someone has waylaid Tom, stolen the money from him, and — for otherwise he would have come home with the tale — injured him, or worse."

The girl had turned very pale.

"I have thought of that, of course," she said faintly. "Yet it does not seem probable. I know every step of the way he must take from our home to the bank. He goes through no alleys or vacant places; it is the heart of the city, and the streets are crowded. It was midafternoon on a fine summer day."

"Might he not have met someone who enticed him away?"

"My brother is young, Mr. Poe, but he is not a child. He is thoroughly mature and responsible. He would have gone nowhere with anyone until he had done his errand. And in case you are wondering if $200 might have tempted him to run off with it, he has always plenty of spending money from our mother, and knows that he has only to ask, to receive any amount from her he may need. Indeed, he actually asked that his allowance at college be made less, as it tempted him to gamble."

"Ah, yes." Poe was silent a moment, perhaps remembering dark days of his own at that same university. "You have, of course, inquired at the bank?"

"As soon as it opened this morning. I did not wish to arouse alarm, so I merely asked if I might see the record of our deposits. Nothing was deposited yesterday."

"So here is a boy who has simply disappeared. You doubt — and your reasoning is sound — that he could have met with foul play. You are sure he was not enticed away nor did he abscond with the money. Yet he is gone, and the money too. What could anyone make of that puzzle?"

"Not 'anyone,' Mr. Poe — you. This evening, after I had once more reassured my mother, when I took her supper up to her, that Tom was feeling better and would surely come in to see her tomorrow or at the latest the day after, I went downstairs again and paced the floor in utter despair. Then I thought suddenly, 'M. Dupin could solve this mystery!' And you, Mr. Poe, are M. Dupin."

"I thank you for the compliment, Miss Vivian. It is true that I believe any natural happening can be explained through the exercise of the reasoning mind. But this — there is so little to go on. And time presses; you must have an answer — the correct answer — at once."

"That is true. Will you help me?"

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"On one condition. Go home now, and try, if you can, to secure a good night's sleep. I shall think of nothing else meanwhile but your problem. If it is soluble by human thought, I can promise you the solution. Come here again tomorrow morning, and I shall tell you the results of my night's work. But if by that time I am not able to tell you where your brother went, what happened to him, and how he may be returned to your home, you must give me your word that you will go to the proper authorities and put the matter in their hands."

"I promise. You have made my heart lighter already, Mr. Poe. I have absolute faith in you."

"I shall try to deserve it. Mother!" he called to Mrs. Clemm through the open door, "I shall see this young lady to her home, since it has grown dark. I shall return in a few minutes."

"I can go with her," his mother-in-law answered quickly. "You must not interrupt your train of thought — I have heard your conversation. And Sis may need you."

Poe smiled.

"I shall be back immediately, mother," he said gently. "And I shall meet no one or nothing on the way to distract me."

"Please, I can go alone —" Clara Vivian began.

"Come. Let me just find my hat."

They did not speak in the short two blocks; both were lost in thought. At her door he pressed her hand and raised his hat.

"Good night," he said. "I shall expect you by eight o'clock tomorrow."

Promptly at eight the next morning she was there. Poe himself opened the door this time. Her face was radiant. He smiled.

"Your brother returned home last night, did he not?" he asked.

"He was there when I went in. How did you know?"

"There was only one possible alternative. If he had not met with robbery and accompanying injury or death, if he had not run away or been lured away, there was only one other reason why he could have disappeared. And given that reason, I could estimate the probable time of his return. If he went to Baltimore by the steam train, he must have got back early last evening. If he went farther south, then he would still have returned by early this morning. Apparently he went to Baltimore."

"He did. He said —"

"Let me tell you; it pleases my vanity. I worked the whole affair out by pure ratiocination. I made a chart of all the various alternatives, and by eliminating one after another, only one was left. He lost the $200."

"Yes. He had reached the bank when he felt in his breast pocket for the wallet in which he had placed the money separately from his own. It was not there. The bottom of his pocket was worn and had given way. He retraced his steps but there was no trace of the wallet; undoubtedly someone had found it and he realized that it was unlikely to be returned."

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"So, being of an age when he was proud of the responsibility laid upon him, and ashamed to return and confess his carelessness, the only thing he could think of was to obtain the money elsewhere. He had a fair sum with him, but of course nowhere near such an amount. It was enough, however, for him to go to a place where money was owed him.

"You told me he had asked to have his allowance reduced, to be saved from the temptation of gambling — a very sore one at Charlottesville, as I know to my own cost. That sounded unlikely to me — it was not the sort of excuse a boy might give his mother and sister. It seemed to me more likely that he was being besieged beyond his patience and desire by some of his impecunious classmates who *were* constant — and unlucky — gamblers and who were in the habit of treating him as a source of ready loans, since he was affluent and they were not. Undoubtedly there would be one or more who would owe him considerable money by the end of term. He did not worry about it, as he knew they would pay him when college began again. But now he needed $200 at once, and he was sure of getting it, on explaining the circumstances, because it was a debt of honor. So all he did was go to the person — or persons — who owed him that much. He got it, and he came home again.

"If he had been older and more thoughtful, he would have realized that his sudden disappearance for so long a time would perplex and frighten you, and perhaps prove a serious shock to your mother if you could not conceal it from her — though I imagine you have long practised that sort of amiable deception on her when your brother was merely late for meals or bedtime. But all he thought of was making good what he must have felt to be a breach of trust. I am very glad the story has so happy an ending."

"That is not the ending, Mr. Poe. I have yet to show my gratitude."

"It is I who should be grateful, my dear Miss Vivian. It is a satisfaction to have proved to myself once more that my deductions were correct. And after all, your brother returned before you even heard my solution of the mystery."

"That does not matter. My mind was already relieved when we parted at the door. You have been more than kind to me. And I must show some tangible thanks for your kindness. You must let me — will you please accept this $100 as a token of my appreciation?"

The pale face flushed, and the slight figure stood still more erect.

"This has been an affair of friendship, Miss Vivian, not a business transaction. I am happy to have been of service. My compliments to your brother Tom, and tell him to drink a cup to me at the old college when he returns in September. I trust we shall meet again. Good morning."

Baffled, vexed tears in her eyes, Clara heard the door close behind her and found her way to the gate again. She had just turned the corner into

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Brandywine Street when she sensed swift footsteps following her. It was Mrs. Clemm.

Out of breath, the old lady laid her hand on Clara's arm.

"I heard," she said, when she had recovered herself. "My dear, he is very proud; you should never have offered him money for doing a courteous service to a neighbor. I am the one to whom you should have spoken. I have no pride left — I cannot afford it. We are so terribly poor, Miss Vivian. Poor Eddie! Poor Sis! You have no idea what a hard life they lead, and they both deserve so much better. You may give me the $100. I shall see that Eddie never suspects."

"It was stupid of me. I feel ashamed. And when I think that all I wanted was to be of help — I do so admire your son-in-law!"

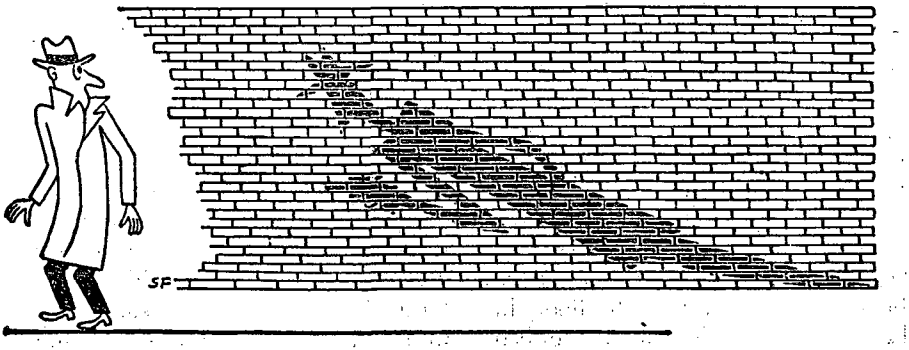
"You are a romantic young lady." She thrust the little packet of currency into the pocket of her black skirt. "I was afraid he was going to ask to meet your brother. What should you have said then?"

Clara looked at her in astonishment.

"You mean — you guessed —"

"I have lived in this neighborhood for some time, Miss Vivian. Eddie is lost in his work, and my daughter cannot leave her bed any more. We have few acquaintances, but I am always about doing the marketing and shopping, and I know by hearsay all the old residents for two squares around. I have often heard of you and your mother. I have heard that you write stories and poems, and even had a sketch printed in 'Burton's Magazine,' when Eddie was its editor. You had no way to meet an author you admired. And you have a good heart and a generous purse; you know how poor we are, and you wanted to help without offense.

"Indeed, my dear Miss Vivian, I know perfectly well that you do not have a brother."

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# TENTH ANNIVERSARY STORY

*"Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" was born on September 25, 1941. To borrow a phrase from Dorothy L. Sayers about something else entirely, EQMM was "flung like a bombshell into the field of detective fiction" — the first quality magazine of its kind in America. In true "coming out" style, EQMM was launched, with pomp and ceremony, at the Detective Story Centennial Luncheon held at the Hotel Waldorf-Astoria, New York City, in honor of the 100th Anniversary of the World's First Detective Story — Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." The double-barreled festivities were broadcast over a coast-to-coast radio hook-up and were attended by such notables and aficionados as Henry Seidel Canby, Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach, Major Alexander P. de Seversky, William Lyon Phelps, Burton Rascoe, Arthur Garfield Hays, Dr. Foster Kennedy, Howard Haycraft, Tony Sarg, Raymond Gram Swing, and by such representative detective-story writers as Carolyn Wells, Anthony Abbot, Mignon G. Eberhart, and your Editors.*

*Now we enter upon the tenth year of EQMM's existence, and it seems only fitting that we go back to Volume 1, Number 1, and bring you a story from that original issue — to celebrate our Tenth 'Tec Anniversary. Perhaps you would be curious to know the contents of EQMM's very first issue. The magazine was smaller in those experimental days — we were able to offer only seven stories then; but surely those seven stories have withstood all the tests which a decade of criticism could put them through. Every one of those seven stories could be reprinted today, with no feeling that age has withered, nor custom staled, their inaugural integrity, their perennial purity, or their detectival diversity.*

*In the Fall of 1941 EQMM made its debut with:*

Too Many Have Lived . . . . . by Dashiell Hammett
The Question Mark . . . . . by Margery Allingham
The Cablegram . . . . . by T. S. Stribling
Perfect Crime of Mr. Digberry . by Anthony Abbot
Dime a Dance . . . . . by Cornell Woolrich
Wild Onions . . . . . by Frederick Hazlitt Brennan
The Treasure Hunt . . . . . by Ellery Queen

*Of these first-issue stories we have selected the Anthony Abbot tale for reprint — after ten years. It is one of the few short stories that Anthony*



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*Abbot (whose real name is Fulton Oursler) wrote about his famous detective, Thatcher Colt, and as we described it a decade ago, "it is the case of the meek little man and the spread-eagled corpse . . ."*

# ABOUT THE PERFECT CRIME OF MR. DIGBERRY

*by ANTHONY ABBOT*

THE FACTS in the case of Mr. Digberry have not been disclosed by the New York Police Department. Absurd as the statement may sound, Mr. Thatcher Colt, then Police Commissioner, actually connived with the little man to conceal all evidence of his singular misdeeds. Mr. Digberry was guilty of one felony and deeply involved in a second crime of peculiar fiendishness and horror. Yet he was allowed to go free, with his pockets stuffed with money and his secret utterly safe.

Now, after three years, the Digberry bargain has come to an end. In revealing the circumstances, as I learned them while I was confidential secretary to the commissioner, I am able to give at last a complete account of the murder of one of the most beautiful women in New York.

I first saw Mr. Digberry in the line-up about nine-thirty one scorching August morning. More than a thousand detectives were crowded into the old gymnasium of the Headquarters Building at 240 Centre Street. Across the runway, that Monday morning, passed a defiant parade of lawbreakers. Auto thieves and dope peddlers, gunmen and blackmailers, they came forth, put on their hats and took them off again, stood fullface and profile, and were marched off in custody.

It was in such unholy company that Thatcher Colt and I encountered one of the truly unique conspirators of criminal history.

"Everett P. Digberry!"

Assistant Chief Inspector Flynn barked the name angrily, and a small, bald-headed man, with a fringe of gray hair around his temples and with large, blinking eyes, walked indignantly toward the center of the platform. His gray Palm Beach suit was wrinkled, and against his left side he pressed a stiff straw hat, banded with a gay ribbon of red and blue.

"You were found climbing over the back wall of St. Christopher's Cemetery, the Bronx, at two A.M. on Sunday, and you are charged with carrying a concealed weapon without a license. Are you guilty or not?"

"I would like to explain," began Mr. Digberry. "As a citizen, I demand —"

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"Have you ever been arrested before?"

"Never. I can explain everything!"

"You'll have to!" was Flynn's grim assurance. "Where did you get this gun — a thirty-two-caliber French Touron? Come on, now, speak up!"

"I haven't the remotest idea where I got it," rasped Mr. Digberry. "All this was due to a letter from the Driller. If you would only listen —"

But by then he was being yanked through the door, and the next suspect faced the lights.

"Tony," whispered Thatcher Colt to me, "get that fellow and bring him to my office. I want to talk to him!"

I glanced at Colt in surprise. But orders were orders, and at ten o'clock I led my man into the commissioner's private office.

"I've just read a report about you, Digberry," Colt stated accusingly. "You've been lying! What were you doing in that graveyard at two o'clock in the morning?"

Mr. Digberry gulped. "I've been trying to answer that all night long, and no one will listen to me! Won't you let me tell my story?"

"Do I understand that you have a letter signed by the Driller?"

"I have, chief!"

"Then go ahead and tell your story in your own way."

"Well, you see, to begin with, I'm a wigmaker," explained Mr. Digberry. "I carry on a manufacturing business founded by my grandfather. I produce wigs of mohair, human hair, and of silk and wool, suitable for all characters and impersonations. Also, a complete line of wigs for dolls."

"What has that to do with your recent behavior? You'll have to come to the point!"

"I am now at the point," declared Mr. Digberry. "I am only a victim, chief. You see, I've been spending the summer alone at my home in New Rochelle. My family — I have a wife and six daughters — are at a bungalow in Maine. That's why I've had to face the whole thing alone. This letter — this ghastly letter from the Driller — came at a moment when I needed all my mental resources for my own business. I am about to launch a new idea in the wig field: a soft, flexible cap of silk gauze, with the hair sewn —"

"When did you get this letter?" interrupted Colt.

"One week ago."

"What did it say?"

"It told me I must pay the sum of one thousand dollars or be killed!"

"And how were you to pay this money?"

"I was to wait for directions."

"And you received them?"

"Yes, chief; that's why I was in the graveyard. Three days after the letter arrived, my telephone rang about six in the morning. A harsh voice told me to get the thousand dollars, and on Saturday — really, two o'clock Sunday morning — carry it in a bundle to Waverly Avenue and Gorsuch Street, in the Bronx; to climb over the wall of St. Christopher's Cemetery and go at once to my own family

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plot. I have three aunts buried in that plot. I was told to lay the money on the middle grave — Aunt Kate's."

"And you did that — without consulting the police?"

"Yes, I did, chief. After all, I have my wife and six daughters to think of. I drew the money out of our savings, laid it on Aunt Kate's grave and ran. But as I ran, I looked back and I saw a tall man pick up the money and disappear among the trees. Then I climbed over the wall and practically dropped into the arms of one of your policemen!"

"But you carried a revolver. Where did that come from?"

"As heaven is my witness, I don't know! I found it in my room about half past ten last Saturday night. I had gone out for a few minutes, and when I returned, I found the gun on the bed. A burglar has been in our apartment house three times recently. Perhaps he left it there. I don't know. But I took it along when I started for the cemetery. I meant to give it to an officer and explain —"

Colt looked incredulous and changed the subject. "From what bank did you get the money?"

"The Drovers and Mechanics in New Rochelle."

Colt glanced at me; a flash of his eyes that was an instruction. Going to another room, I called the manager of the Drovers and Mechanics Bank. Back in Colt's office, I nodded quickly — Colt knew I had confirmed the fact that Mr. Digberry had withdrawn one thousand dollars.

"I'm going to be reasonable with you," Colt told the nervous little man. "Frankly, I don't believe your story about that revolver. I'll give you the benefit of the doubt, but only if you're on the level and help the police."

"I'll do anything — anything."

"Where is your letter from the Driller?" Colt demanded, as he pressed a buzzer.

"In the top left-hand drawer of my wife's bureau at home."

The door opened to admit Captain Israel Henry, the official guardian of Colt's office.

"Send a detective with Mr. Digberry to his home for a letter," ordered Colt. "Bring down all his personal papers — bankbooks, insurance policies. Arrange with the district attorney to delay his appearance before the magistrate. And come back here with the letter."

At the door the captive turned. "Chief, my wife and daughters are coming home tomorrow afternoon. Can't I be released in time to meet them? And can't I get out of this without anybody being the wiser?"

Captain Henry practically tossed him through the door. Meanwhile, Colt had opened a drawer of his desk, lifted out a sheaf of papers and cast them on the blotter.

"The Driller's been causing some excitement, Tony."

"Don't believe I ever heard of him."

"Probably some harmless nitwit, but because of the people involved, I

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have to take it seriously. Ten of Manhattan's foremost citizens have received letters like the one that fellow just described. The chairman of the Opera Society got the first one. That was two weeks ago. Since then, several friends of mine have received similar threats. Each letter was typewritten and demanded payment of money, with death as the penalty for disobedience. Each promised further instructions as to how payment was to be made, and each was signed 'The Driller.'"

"Of course it's a crank!"

"The fantastic entrance of Mr. Digberry into the affair makes me wonder. Remember that all the other letters went to eminent citizens, ranging from John Otts, the bank president, to Margaret Coleman, the coloratura soprano. All persons of position and wealth — except Digberry. And Digberry is a wigmaker!"

Two minutes later, at Colt's summons, Inspector Flynn stalked into the office and Colt explained the situation.

"Get in touch with all these people who received Driller letters, Flynn! Find out if any of them know Digberry or have had any dealings with him."

Within half an hour Flynn phoned me. "Tell the chief I've got a man in my office who knows all about Digberry."

"Send him right up!" was Colt's instruction.

The stranger who entered the commissioner's office a minute or two later was young and slender and blond, with keen blue eyes and the grace that expresses athletic strength. He was Captain Edgar Walters, a correspondent for foreign journals, who lived in an East Side riverview apartment.

"I am a friend of Margaret Coleman," the visitor explained. "I was told you wished to question me."

"You know Digberry?"

"Madame Coleman does. I've met him once or twice. Eggy runt, you know — harmless but full of eloquence."

"How does Madame Coleman know Digberry?"

Captain Walters grinned. "Through his art as a wigmaker. He's an enthusiast about his work — a left-handed chap who can draw curious designs. He made Madame Coleman a remarkable wig for her rôle as Gilda in 'Rigoletto,' and has since made her other wigs. Mr. Digberry has a passion for exactitude. His wigs are most realistic."

Colt nodded thoughtfully and asked, "Where is Madame Coleman now?"

"In Norway."

"But she received one of these letters?"

"It was turned over to me."

"And what is your relation to Madame?"

Captain Walters made an expressive gesture with his hands. "I am what is called a 'ghost.' Madame Coleman's book of memoirs is soon to be published. I'm writing them for her — under her name, of course. We came

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to know each other when I was publishing a Riviera society and fashion magazine at Menton, and interviewed her there. That was before her divorce — you recall she was married to Lucius Polk Coleman, that jealous old poof-poof? A millionaire, but a hopeless muffle-head. I told her she was a fool to stick to him, and when that blew up —"

"Is the wigmaker trustworthy?"

Captain Walters chuckled. "Honest, yes; harmless, too, but the most garrulous creature alive. I don't know him well, but Madame Coleman finds him stimulating."

When Captain Walters had departed, after seeing the other Driller letters, Colt once more signaled for Flynn.

"I want to keep busy on this case," he told the inspector. "Trace that Digberry revolver. And let's go further with that paper, too — all those Driller notes were on identical sheets. . . . Now, Tony, let's get at this budget report."

But the budget was doomed to be neglected. Just before noon, Colt's phone rang sharply. The commissioner listened a minute, then swore devoutly. He hung up the receiver and reached for his hat. "Woman murdered on Sixty-fourth Street. One of our men who was at the line-up this morning is on the scene. And what did he find on the mantelpiece but a photograph of our Mr. Digberry!"

I reached for my hat as Colt braced Captain Henry.

"When Digberry is brought back here, hold him incommunicado. See particularly that he learns nothing about this Sixty-fourth Street murder!"

Drawn up under the porte-cochère on the Broome Street side of Headquarters was the commissioner's car. At the wheel sat the moonfaced Neil McMahon, Colt's chauffeur. With the siren blowing defiance of all the red lights, we raced uptown to the Wedgeworth Arms on Sixty-fourth Street, a few doors from Central Park.

The crime had been committed in a fourth-floor rear apartment, furnished — two rooms, kitchenette and bath. Here we found a full detail from the Homicide Squad and Doctor J. L. Multooler, an assistant medical examiner.

"We didn't want to move the body until you came, commissioner," the doctor explained. "You'll find it a peach of a case!"

"What's the woman's name?"

"She was known here as Mrs. Samuel Smith. Probably a fake!"

I am not easily shaken by woeful sights, but the scene that awaited us in that inner room was unnerving.

It was like a living room, but with a bed that collapsed into a wall closet. The door to that closet was now open wide, and the body of the victim was standing bolt upright, facing us — a beautiful blond woman, her face rouged and powdered.

She had been shot through the left temple, and the powder burns showed that the weapon had been held close to her head. It must have been the

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killer who placed her in this extraordinary position. Her shoeless feet were on the floor; a scarf was tied around her throat and drawn through the bedsprings. Her arms were lifted so that the ripped sleeves of her costly dress were attached to hooks in opposite sides of the closet.

Doctor Multooler's voice broke the silence. "I wonder who she really is!"

Colt turned to the surgeon with an amazed expression. "You don't recognize her?" he exclaimed. "This is the body of Margaret Coleman, the coloratura soprano. She was believed to be in Norway."

The commissioner's piercing glances searched the room, rested finally upon an overstuffed armchair drawn up to a window, overlooking a courtyard. The chair faced the singer's body.

Colt studied this chair with patient care.

"Blood on the upholstery," he announced. "She must have been sitting in this chair. The murderer entered the room unheard. He crept up behind her and shot through her left temple."

"But only a left-handed person would do that!" I exclaimed.

To this deduction of mine (of which I felt rather proud), Colt made no answer. Instead, he approached the body once more and lifted its left wrist.

"Bracelet watch with crystal broken," he announced. "That slight bruise over the right eye probably means the body toppled forward, striking the watch on the floor. The hands of the watch stopped at ten minutes past twelve."

"So the time of the murder is fixed," said Doctor Multooler.

Again Colt refrained from comment. Instead, he turned to Captain Allerton of the Homicide Squad.

"Observe that she had recently powdered and rouged her face. Get the trademark name of the powder, rouge and lipstick," directed the commissioner. "There must be samples in this apartment."

As Allerton moved along, Colt turned to a detective from the D. A.'s office.

"Where's that picture of Digberry?"

The detective pointed to the mantel behind us. There, indeed, stood a likeness of the wigmaker of New Rochelle. The picture had been torn across as if by angry hands. The top of it was missing. Colt picked it up with a low whistle of amazement.

Just then Captain Allerton brought in the manager of the Wedgeworth Arms, Percy J. Cooper. Colt questioned him in the outer room.

"When did anyone in this apartment house last see this woman alive?"

"Saturday night, about seven-thirty, when she had a meal served in her room."

"Did she have any visitors that night?"

"Yes, sir. That man there!" The manager pointed to Digberry's photograph.

"Do you know him?"

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"I disrecollect his name, but we noticed him around here all the time."

"At what hour was he here on Saturday night?"

"The elevator boy says he got here late. He don't remember just when."

Mr. Cooper had not known his tenant was a famous singer; Margaret Coleman had not been recognized by the employees or tenants. She had come to the Wedgeworth Arms early in June — three days after her reported sailing, as it later developed — and engaged the apartment, paying two months' rent in advance.

"Did Madame have many visitors?"

"A few. One I distinctly remember — a gray-haired man about sixty. They had a terrific row about money. The neighbors heard Madame Coleman crying that she had been robbed and made penniless. I had to object to the noise."

"When was that?"

"About a month ago. I think the gray-haired man — he was short and dapper, I remember, and he carried a stick — came two or three times before, but never after that scene. She stopped at the desk the next morning and apologized. She said the man was her husband and asked me never to let him up in the elevator again."

"And Mr. Digberry — did he come often?" asked Colt, placing the torn photograph in his pocket.

"Nearly every night."

"Who discovered the body?"

"The floor maid. She couldn't get in yesterday, so she decided the tenant did not wish to be disturbed. But this morning, when no one answered her knocking, she went in. Seeing nobody around, she went ahead and cleaned up — until she opened that door!"

Colt dismissed the manager and we returned to the inner room. Inspector Flynn, who had arrived shortly after we did, came forward with something that gleamed dully in his hand. "The bullet that did it," he announced. "It flattened against the wall beside that armchair. My guess would be a thirty-two."

"Send it to the ballistics department," Colt ordered. "Tell them to compare it with the bullets from Digberry's gun."

Hedge, one of the assistant D. A.'s, was conferring with Captain Allerton.

"Our men have searched everywhere," Allerton reported, seeing Colt. "But all Madame Coleman's personal papers are missing. Whoever did it was thorough. No fingerprints, except the lady's."

Colt nodded abstractedly, his eyes once more searching the room for some significant detail. But there seemed to be no visible clues.

"Our men questioned twenty people in flats near this one; nobody heard the shot," continued Allerton. "But on Saturday night there were radios going in a lot of rooms in the house."

Colt's stalking around the room had brought him back to the open closet. The expanse of coiled bedspring filled his gaze. Beginning at the upper left-hand corner, he studied it by

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inches. Presently he lifted an almost invisible object that had been caught in the bedspring.

It was a gray hair!

On the sleeve of his left arm, Colt placed that threadlike clue. Against the blue serge, he could study it clearly; it was, indeed, a human hair, and yet there was a tiny fragment at one end that was certainly not human; it seemed more like a knotted sliver of white gauze.

I produced a department envelope from my pocket. In this, the hair was sealed and marked for identification.

Meanwhile, Colt was giving Flynn instructions. "Get Madame Coleman's husband. I want to question him downtown. And get the writer — Captain Walters. There are a few things he'll have to clear up. I'd like pictures of both of them. And come down to my office as soon as you can, inspector. I want you there when I talk to Digberry."

But our leaving was still delayed. Captain Allerton had obtained samples of Madame's facial preparations and Colt sat down to study them.

As I waited for him near the door, I felt a clammy hand touch mine. I turned around hastily to find myself staring into the pale eyes of Cooper.

"Take this," he whispered.

He placed in my hands a legal-sized envelope with bulky contents. A rubber band was around it; the flap was sealed.

"A thousand dollars reward for anyone who finds the guilty man — it might help the hotel's reputation," Cooper gurgled, and darted away.

As soon as we were in the car, I told the commissioner about the money. He merely nodded and shoved the envelope into his pocket. He remained silent until we reached Headquarters at two-thirty.

Digberry was waiting for us. "Where's the letter?" was Colt's first question.

Detective Mulvaney, who stood beside the prisoner, handed over a much-fingered envelope, from which Colt drew out a single sheet of note paper. It was a duplicate of the ten others reposing in the drawer at his right hand.

"This calls for one thousand dollars or death," he commented. "Where is your bank passbook?"

Mulvaney promptly offered a gray-backed booklet, on the front of which appeared the names of Everett P. and Hattie Elizabeth Digberry, and a statement that the account was payable to either, or both, and to the survivor.

Colt flipped the pages; then glanced at the prisoner. "This is a new book. It has just been issued!"

"I lost the old one about three weeks ago. The bank advertised the loss, and then issued this new one."

Colt's eyes were solemn and accusing. "We'll come back to the bankbook matter later. In the meantime, what were your relations with Margaret Coleman?"

Mr. Digberry's cheeks blanched. "She was one of my customers," he replied.

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"Wasn't she an intimate friend?"

"Miss Coleman reposed a great deal of confidence in me as an artist in my own line," the wigmaker admitted.

"Is that why she put your picture on her mantel? And is that why you visited her almost every night, when she was supposed to be in Europe?" pursued Colt relentlessly.

The prisoner thrust out his chin. His silence was plainly meant for defiance.

"Are you refusing to answer?"

"I am!" declared Mr. Digberry. "I really am! There's such a thing as professional confidence. Any questions about Madame Coleman she can answer for herself."

"You know better than that, Digberry. You know as well as I do that Margaret Coleman cannot answer any questions."

"How should I know that? Why can't she?"

"Because she's dead!"

"Dead! Margaret — dead?"

"Murdered!" Colt added. "With a bullet through her head. And you didn't know anything about that, did you?"

"Nothing!" groaned Digberry. "As God is my witness, I knew nothing about it."

"Didn't you visit Margaret Coleman Saturday night?" Colt demanded.

"No! Indeed, no!"

"Where were you?"

"I was in the cemetery."

"Where were you at midnight?"

"I was waiting outside the cemetery until the time to leave the money."

"Anybody see you from eleven-thirty until you were arrested at two?"

"Not a soul."

"And you call that an alibi?"

"I call it hell!" declared Mr. Digberry.

"I'm waiting to know what your relations were with Margaret Coleman."

"She liked me," replied Digberry. "There was nothing immoral in our friendship. She was lonely. So was I. She was tired of her smart friends. She always said she could talk to me. And she admired my work. You know she was divorced?"

"Well?"

"Her husband was Lucius Polk Coleman — a very rich man. When they parted he made a settlement. But even though they were divorced, he still wanted to tell her what to do with her money. Soon the money was all gone. She said she had been cheated out of it. She blamed a man — she would not name him, but I never had any doubt. Literally, Mr. Colt, that poor lady, that truly great musical artist, was broke. Think of that humiliation. Yet she had to keep up appearances. So she pretended to go abroad. Her idea was to save every cent to prepare for next season. But her stocks went down to nothing — literally nothing. And all the time she was working with a man at the bank to punish the man who had robbed her."

"What bank?" interposed Colt.

"The Harrison National."

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Colt reached for the telephone. In five minutes one of our Wall Street Squad was on his way to the Harrison National Bank. While Colt was talking, Inspector Flynn came in. He saluted and sat down.

"Go on!" prompted Colt, when he had finished phoning.

"I was telling you," resumed Digberry, "how Madame pretended —"

"Never mind. Take a look at this, and see if you know what it is."

On his desk Colt laid the envelope containing the gray hair. He extracted the strand with a small pair of pincers.

"I recognize that," Digberry said spitefully. "It's evidently from a very poor wig made by a faker named Wilkins."

"How can you make a positive statement like that?" asked Colt.

"I know by the way that knot is tied. One wigmaker knows another's work."

Colt put away the hair. "Whom did Madame Coleman fear most?"

"Her husband. She was getting evidence to bring action against him."

Flynn chuckled grimly. "Surely you can tell us more than that. For instance, what time did you leave the Wedgeworth Arms on Saturday night?"

"I just told the chief I wasn't there on Saturday night," reiterated Mr. Digberry.

"But the manager saw you!"

"Not me. On Saturday night I had my own worries; I had to put a thousand dollars on Aunt Kate's grave."

"Is that the best you can do?" Colt cried. "All right, Flynn. Take him downstairs and let the boys talk to him!"

"The third degree!" groaned Digberry.

Flynn sent him off, shut the door and walked over to Colt's desk. "Here are the two pictures you wanted. I talked with Walters. He's out of it. At the time this woman was killed, Walters and a friend who spent the night with him were talking with our sergeant on that beat. That's an alibi nobody can smash."

"But what about her husband?"

Flynn sighed. "He sailed at one A.M. Saturday on a liner due in Cherbourg five days from now."

The door closed on Inspector Flynn.

"Get me the address of Wilkins," Colt called to me.

As I hurried to the outer office, I left him, telephone in hand, asking to be connected with the chief of the Paris police. I found the address of Elmer Wilkins, wigmaker, and Colt decided to call upon him.

Mr. Wilkins, a man with ears too big, a nose too long and a mouth too wide, received us with a Chinaman's smile. Before we had spoken, he assured us that his firm was the oldest and most reliable in the United States.

Colt silenced him by stating, "I don't wish to buy any artificial hair today. I'm the police commissioner, and I want information." He drew forth the gray hair. "Now, what can you tell me about that?"

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Mr. Wilkins produced a magnifying glass. "Perhaps it's from a wig that was made here," he conceded.

"How long since you made a gray wig?"

"I'll show you my records."

For ten minutes Colt and Wilkins pored over the books. Then I saw Colt produce three photographs from his pocket.

"Recognize any one of these men?"

"Why — why, yes I do. This one — it's the man himself."

"You have a quick eye, Mr. Wilkins. That's all I want to know."

With Wilkins' promise to remain within call, we hurried off. It was now six-thirty P.M.

"Amusing thing!" Colt said. "Just before we left, I had a telephone call from our Wall Street man. He discovered what Coleman was up to in her investigation, and it certainly ties up with that wig."

For the rest of that night and down to the Tuesday-morning breakfast hour Colt labored constantly on the Coleman murder case. Three times that night he talked on the transatlantic telephone with the Paris police. He also held a ten-minute conversation by radiophone with the captain of the liner on which Lucius Coleman had sailed. But not until an hour before midnight did we get a break in the case.

That came with the report of Doctor Multooler. At eleven he called Colt. "The autopsy fixes the time of death within ten minutes of ten o'clock," he announced.

"But Madame's watch stopped shortly after midnight!" gasped Colt.

"Nevertheless, my evidence is positive. I'll send you a full report in writing."

Multooler's discovery upset Colt's previous calculations. "I think we'll go up to the abode of Digberry," he announced.

The wigmaker's home was in St. Nicholas Place, not far from the railroad station in New Rochelle. During our swift drive to the suburb, Colt remarked, "That watch must have been stopped by opening the back and depressing the spring. Not a new alibi — but I didn't suspect it."

No more was said until we reached our destination, an old-fashioned, five-story apartment building known as the Gloria Arms. Mr. Digberry leased Suite G, on the second floor, and the janitor willingly let us in. For ten minutes we traversed our prisoner's deserted rooms, but Colt admitted that his search was almost barren.

On our way out, he paused to question the girl in charge of the outmoded lobby switchboard. Yes, she had worked last Saturday night. Yes, she remembered a call for Mr. Digberry around ten-thirty. She finally admitted she had listened in.

"I heard a man say he had a message from Madame Coleman and would like to see Mr. Digberry at once, down at the railroad station. Right after that Mr. Digberry went out. But he came right back. After a little while I saw him go out again, and he didn't come back for quite a

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while. Even then, he went out later."

As Colt lighted his pipe in the car, his face was grave. "I won't know how to put this thing together," he confessed, "if all Digberry's extraordinary story is proved true. But this much is obvious. If our little bald friend is innocent, then the murderer played him a villainous trick.

"I believe I see through this crime now, Tony — but I don't know yet how to pin it on the murderer. There's one long shot," he added. "Do you remember that Walters had a visitor who spent the night with him? Well, Tony, there's our long shot; if it hits, we might get a perfect case."

When we returned to Headquarters, I sat down at my typewriter. I had three books full of stenographic pothooks on the case, and soon I was absorbed in their transcription. It must have been an hour later when I was disturbed by voices in the commissioner's office. I entered to find Colt seated at his desk. Spread before him were a gray Palm Beach suit and a straw hat with a band of red and blue. Colt was issuing orders to a detective.

"Use the vacuum cleaner on these clothes," directed the commissioner, "and turn the results over to our laboratory. The chemists know what to look for."

The detective saluted, gathered up the costume and departed.

"I've taken a chance on our long shot, Tony," declared Colt wearily.

It was Tuesday noon — twenty-four hours after the discovery of Margaret Coleman's body. Gathered in Colt's office were Inspector Flynn and Digberry, the commissioner and myself.

Flynn had failed to break down Digberry; nevertheless the inspector was satisfied of the little man's guilt.

"Mr. Digberry, where did you go when you left your house at ten-thirty Saturday night?" Colt demanded.

"I went to the station to see a man who didn't show up."

Flynn snorted. "I think we've stalled long enough with this fellow. I want to charge him with murder!"

"You have no case against me at all!" Digberry cried. "I demand to be represented by a lawyer!"

"You'll need a doctor if you take that tone," Flynn came back. "You wrote those Driller letters. We've traced the paper from the manufacturer to the dealer and found a supply of it in that hair works you run in New Rochelle. And the experts swear all the letters were written on a typewriter in your joint. And the one you wrote to yourself was only to cover up."

"Why should I do such a thing?" shouted Digberry.

Flynn gave a harsh chuckle. "You're asking me? You sent them as a blind, so the police would think the Driller killed Margaret Coleman. And he did. For you're the Driller, Digberry."

"I did *not* kill her!" Digberry screamed. "Why should I kill her?"

"Because you had a love affair with her. You've lied about every-

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thing. Here's the report from the bank. It's true that you drew out a thousand dollars. But not as ransom money, in one lump sum, as you said. You've been drawing that cash out in dribs and drabs all summer. While your wife was away, you were spending money on an opera singer. It was high life for you, Digberry, my boy. But now the end of the summer is near. You thought there was only one way to get rid of that woman. So the whole hocus-pocus was just a scheme of yours to kill Margaret Coleman and put the blame on some made-up villain!"

"Try to prove that I killed her!" Digberry taunted. "Just try!"

"I can do that, too," Flynn grated. "You had a gun on you, didn't you? Well, the shot that killed Margaret Coleman was fired from that gun."

Digberry whirled to Colt. "Mr. Commissioner, I'm not guilty of these things! How am I to face my wife —"

An attendant was ushering Captain Walters into the office.

"Hello!" he cried. "What's the row?"

"Just a few questions, Captain," began Colt. "I believe you told me yesterday you met Madame Coleman at Menton?"

"Quite!"

Colt stood up and pointed at Captain Walters with the bowl of his pipe. "It's a curious fact," he said, "that the revolver which Mr. Digberry says was left in his apartment by a burglar is one of French manufacture, purchased from a dealer in Menton, and containing a mark recognizable to the police!"

Walters began, "Do you infer —?"

"Tony, open that door!"

I opened a door just behind Colt's desk. Wilkins was standing there.

"Mr. Wilkins," called Colt, "do you recognize in this room any of your recent customers?"

Wilkins nodded. "The little blond fellow over there," he rumbled, pointing to Captain Walters. "He's the man I made the bald wig for the other day."

"See any head in this room that your wig resembled?"

The eyes of the two wigmakers met, and Wilkins roared, "Of course! Why didn't I think of it before? That wig was the dead image of old Digberry's head."

"That will do!" said Colt, and I closed the door after Wilkins, as an attendant led him away. Colt again faced Walters.

"I have your complete history," he announced. "This morning you kindly left your fingerprints on sensitized paper that I gave you when I showed you the Driller letters. Your prints were telephotoed to the police in Europe. You served time in France and Holland for blackmail."

Captain Walters laughed convincingly. "My dear Mr. Colt, you can't connect me with this murder. My alibi is complete. I had no motive and no opportunity."

Colt smiled. "You stole Madame Coleman's money, Walters," he said.

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"A banking friend of hers helped her to investigate you. The Parisian police co-operated and they told me all about that. Somehow you learned that the singer was in a fair way to send you to Devil's Island. So you decided to kill her!"

"That is preposterous! I refuse —"

"And you decided to make it a perfect crime. A perfect crime demands that the police have a victim. You decided on Digberry after calling on Margaret Coleman. She refused to forgive you. That was when you tore Digberry's picture. You wanted only the upper part of his head — the lower part might have been recognized by Wilkins, a fellow craftsman. For you meant to kill a woman and have it appear that Digberry was her murderer. That was why you had a wig designed to make you resemble Digberry. That was why you bought a duplicate of his Palm Beach suit and his straw hat. We've traced the shops where you made those purchases. Too bad you didn't destroy the suit and hat and wig, but before you got around to it, they were in our hands.

"You dressed up like Digberry and went to the Wedgeworth Arms. It was a hot night; the door was open and you crept in. Mr. Digberry was left-handed, so you fired the fatal shot with your left hand."

"You can't prove one word."

"The concierge in Menton can prove that you owned the revolver with which Margaret Coleman was killed," pursued Colt. "That was the gun you planted in Digberry's apartment by calling him out and then going in yourself. And after that, you thought the job was finished. You had faked the time on the wrist watch; by eleven o'clock, you were at home with your friend. You expected to prove you were home an hour before the crime was thought to be committed. Too bad a hair of your wig caught in that bedspring."

"You have no evidence that will put me on the scene of the crime," Walters snarled.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Walters," Colt replied. "But I really can put you on the scene of that murder. You remember that Margaret Coleman's face was powdered and rouged. She preferred a distinctive powder made by a craftsman in Norway. Madame still had some of it left from more prosperous days. When the killer lifted that body it was inevitable that some of the powder should fall on his clothing. And our chemists found some of it on your suit."

"I've nothing to say," replied Walters thickly, "until I talk with my attorney."

Two detectives came and took him away to a fate that all New York remembers.

When the door had closed, Inspector Flynn rose. "Mr. Commissioner," he protested, "that was wonderful work, but there's still the evidence against Digberry. He did write those letters; he did lie about taking the money out of the bank."

Colt chuckled. "You're right," he

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agreed. "Mr. Digberry, as Captain Walters told us, has a passion for realism, for exactitude. That is shown in his masterpieces of wigs, and also in his visit to the cemetery."

"But he didn't have a thousand dollars with him, chief —"

"Because he wanted to befriend a lady who had been gracious to him, Mr. Digberry drew on the savings which were the joint property of his wife and himself. Tomorrow, Mrs. Digberry returns. The day of reckoning is at hand. The new bankbook will hide the withdrawals. But what about the balance? Mr. Digberry must explain to his wife what he did with the missing thousand. Hence, he invented these letters and included himself among ten illustrious others."

Flynn began to laugh. But Colt, opening a strongbox in his lower drawer, drew out a sheaf of green paper money.

"The Wedgeworth Arms has posted a reward of one thousand dollars," he explained. "Mr. Digberry, you identified the Wilkins wig — I think you earned the cash and the glory."

"I would like the cash," Digberry admitted. "But chief, my wife mustn't know about this affair. Give the credit to Mr. Flynn."

With his pockets full of money, the wigmaker ran off to meet the train. Colt had promised to keep the facts a deep secret. And so he did — but Digberry, since a widower, has married again and the necessity for silence has passed.

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## *WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE: PHILIP MacDONALD*

*"Love Lies Bleeding" is Philip MacDonald's fourth prize-winning story in EQMM's Five Annual Contests. If you have read Mr. MacDonald's previous three winners, you will realize by the time you have finished "Love Lies Bleeding" that it is different — utterly and completely different — from all three of its predecessors.*

*"Malice Domestic," Mr. MacDonald's first prize-winning story, was what the title promised — a probing of domestic tragedy in the* BEFORE THE FACT *school, with emphasis on the psychological interplay between the murderer and the intended victim; the storytelling was deliberately quiet and restrained, and its suspense grew out of the slow, subtle tightening of circumstances.*

*Mr. MacDonald's second prize-winning story, "The Wood-for-the-Trees," combined the intellectual and the sensational, with greater emphasis on mood, characterization, and the background of an English village, and lesser emphasis on terror and thrills. Again, despite the Jack-the-Ripper theme, the story was told quietly and calmly, and emerged as a tale of pure detection.*

*"The Green-and-Gold String" was written with a light, almost gay, touch. Essentially, it was a rogue story, roguishly presented, although it fused in its main character two perennial types — Sherlock Holmes and Arsène Lupin, the criminologist and the criminal, the manhunter and the malefactor, "crammed simultaneously into the same pair of pants."*

*And now "Love Lies Bleeding": violent and violently emotional; sensational and sensationally told; a study in untrammeled terror . . .*

# LOVE LIES BLEEDING

*by PHILIP MacDONALD*

CYPRIAN didn't like rushing over dinner, so they had eaten early. And now, at eight o'clock, he was alone with coffee in Astrid's living-room while Astrid herself was in the bedroom out of sight and sound, changing into some frock suitable for the party they were going to.

It was very quiet in Astrid's apartment, very comfortable. The maid had gone as soon as they had finished eating, so there weren't even sounds of movement from dining-room and kitchen to disturb the peace. And there was plenty of time. Plenty. Because they needn't arrive at the



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Ballards' before nine thirty at the earliest.

Cyprian stretched luxuriously. He picked his coffee cup from the mantel and drained it and set it down again, his fingers momentarily caressing the delicate texture of the thin china.

He strolled about the room, thinking how well Astrid had done with it, taking pleasure in the blendings and contrasts of color under the soft lights, the balance and position of furniture, the choice and subject of the few paintings.

He went back to the mantel, and took the fragile, thistle-shaped liqueur glass from beside his empty coffee cup. He couldn't remember what was in it, and sniffed at it, his thin sensitive nostrils quivering a little as the sharp, bitter-orange aroma stung them pleasantly. He smiled; he should have known that Astrid wouldn't make mistakes.

He sipped slowly, letting the hot stringency slide over his tongue. He turned his back to the room and faced himself in the big mirror over the mantel and was pleased by what he saw. He could find this evening nothing at variance with the appearance of Cyprian Morse as he wished it to be. With absorbed interest he studied Cyprian — the graceful, high-shouldered slenderness so well set off by the dinner-jacket of midnight blue; the fine-textured pallor of the odd, high-cheekboned face with its heavy-lidded eyes and chiseled mouth which seemed to lift at one corner in satire perpetual but never overstressed; the long slim fingers of the hand which twitched with languid dexterity at the tie which so properly enhanced the silken snowy richness of the shirt and its collar.

The blue gleam of the carved lapis lazuli in his signet ring made him think of Charles, and the time when Charles had given it to him. He turned away from the mirror and sipped at the liqueur again and wished Charles were here and wondered how long it would be before Charles returned from Venezuela. He was looking forward to Charles and Astrid meeting, though he wasn't too sure what Charles's initial reaction would be. Astrid would be all right, of course — and, after all, Charles would very soon find out what she was like, just an awfully nice girl, and a great, an inspired designer. He toyed with visions of making Charles work too. With Astrid doing the sets, and Charles letting himself go on weird, macabre decor, Cyprian Morse's *Abanazar* could well be the most sensational production ever seen in the theater.

Cyprian finished the liqueur, and set down the glass. Still musing on the possibilities of *Abanazar*, he dropped into a big low chair, and found himself — his eyes almost level with a coffee table — looking straight at a photograph of Astrid he hadn't seen before. It was an excellent portrait, oddly and interestingly lighted, and the camera had caught and registered that somehow astringent little smile which some people said spoiled her

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looks, but which had always been for Cyprian a sort of epitome of why he liked her. He went on looking at it now, and thought, as he had thought many times looking at her in life, how necessary a smile it was. Without it there would be no way of knowing that the full-blown and almost aggressive femininity of Astrid's structure was merely an accident in design; no way of telling that in fact she had no nonsense about her but was simply the best of designers and — he was beginning to believe more and more as their association developed — the best of friends.

He stretched again and relaxed in the chair. He was in the after-dinner mood which he liked best, and which only seemed to come when he had had exactly the right amount of a-little-too-much-to-drink. All his senses, all his perceptions, were sharpened to a fine edge beneath a placid sheath of contentment. There was a magazine lying on the table near the photograph, and he reached out a lazy arm and picked it up. It was last month's *Manhattan*, and it fell open in his hands to the theatrical page and the beginning of Burn Heyward's long glowing review of *The Square Triangle*. He knew it nearly by heart, but nevertheless began to read and savor it afresh, starting with the headline, *CYPRIAN MORSE DOES IT AGAIN*, and going through its delicious pæans to the shiny super-plum of the very last paragraph, ". . . *There is no doubt left that, despite his youth and (in this instance at least) his dubious choice of subject, Morse is one of the really important playwrights of the day, certainly the most significant in America . . .*"

He heard the door open behind him, and let the magazine fall shut on his knee and said, "Ready?" without turning around.

"*Cyprian!*" said Astrid's voice.

There was something strange about the sound, a quality which inexplicably, as if it had been some dreadful psychic emanation, seemed to change the shape of his every thought and sensation, so that where he had been relaxed and warmly content, he was now tense and chill with formless apprehension.

"*Cyprian!*" said the voice again, and he came to his feet in a single spasmodic movement, turning to face Astrid as he rose.

He stared at her in stunned amazement and a useless hope of disbelief. His flesh crept, and he seemed to feel the hairs on his neck rising like the hackles on a dog.

She came toward him, slowly — and he backed away. She mustn't touch him, she mustn't touch him.

She drew inexorably closer. She held out her arms to him. He didn't know he was still moving away until the edge of the mantel-shelf came hard against his shoulders. He could feel sweat clammy-cold on his forehead, his upper lip, his neck. Desperately, his mind struggled for mastery over his body. His mind knew that, in reality, this was merely a distressing

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incident hardly removed from the commonplace. His mind knew that a few simple words, a curl of the lip, a lift of the shoulders — any or all of these would free him not only now but forever. But the words had to be uttered, the gestures made — and his body refused the tasks.

She was close now. Very close. She was going to touch him.

She said, in the same thick voice, "Cyprian! Don't look at me like that." And she said, "I love you, Cyprian, you must know that . . ."

There was a ringing in his ears, and the tight gripe of nausea in his stomach. His throat worked as he tried to speak, but no words came from his mouth.

She touched him. She was close against him. His body could feel the dreadful soft warmness of her. There was a mist over his eyes and he could hardly see her through it.

And then her arms were around his neck, soft but implacably strong. His mind screamed something, but the arms tightened their hold. She was speaking, but he couldn't hear through the roaring in his head. Somehow, he tore himself free. Forgetting, he tried to retreat, and thudded against the brick of the mantel. With a scrabbling lunge, he went sideways — and almost fell.

He clutched wildly. His left hand caught the edge of the mantelshelf and checked his fall. His right hand, swinging, struck against something metallic and closed around it.

"Cyprian —" said the voice.

She was going to touch him again. Through the haze he could see her, the arms reaching.

There was a clatter of metal as the rest of the fire-irons fell, and his right hand, still grasping the log-pick it had closed around, raised itself above his head and swung downward, with more than all his force.

Through the rushing in his ears, through the red-flecked haze over his eyes, he heard the sick dull crushing of the first blow, saw the slender shape crumple and collapse . . .

The haze and the roaring faded, and he found himself standing half-crouched over the thing on the floor — striking down at it again and again. It was as if some outside power had taken charge of him, so that the blows came without his conscious volition — thudding with the broadside of the heavy bar, then thrusting, slashing, tearing with the sharp point of the spike . . .

Then, piercing the haze and thrusting him back into knowledge of himself, there was a sharp pain in his shoulder as a muscle twisted and cramped.

The log-pick fell from his hands, thudding onto the thick carpet. He looked down at what he had done — and then, an arm flung across his eyes, he turned and ran, stumbling and wavering, for the outer door of the apartment.

He smashed into it — scrabbled with shaking hands for the latch — tore it open — plunged out into the corridor — and, sightless, witless,

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came into heavy collision with a man and a woman just passing the door.

The woman lurched against the opposite wall. Cursing, the man snarled at Cyprian and caught him by the shoulder and straightened his slim bent body and thrust him back against the door jamb. The woman took one horrified look at Cyprian and screamed. The man stared and said, "What in the name of —"

Cyprian swayed. Everything — the figures facing him, the walls and doors, the lights overhead, the pattern of the corridor carpet — all swung crazily together before his eyes; swung and tilted so that he reeled, and clutched vainly for support — and slid down against the jamb to sit sprawled and ungainly on the floor.

The woman said, "Look at him. *Look* at him!" in a shaking voice. "That's *blood!*" And the man said heavily, "What goes on around here?"

Cyprian moaned — and began to vomit. Above him the man said, "I'm going to take a look in there," and moved through the open doorway.

The woman went after him, and there glowed in Cyprian's mind the first sudden and frightful awareness of his danger. Even as another spasm shook him, a tiny self-preservatory spark was born, and when the woman began to scream just inside the door, he was already mumbling to himself, ". . . *there was a man . . . he went through the window . . .*"

And then the beginning of the long nightmare.

The man and woman rushing out of the apartment. Shouting. Doors opening. People. More screaming. Trying to get to his feet and failing. More men, one in shirt-sleeves, another in a robe, standing over him like guards. Sirens wailing outside. Whistles. Noise. Voices. Elevator doors clanging and heavy feet tramping down the corridor. New voices, harsh and different. Men in uniform. The other faces going, the new faces staring down at him, looming behind the harsh voices. A hand as ruthless as God's pulling him to his feet . . .

He wanted help. He craved succor. " . . . *there was a man . . . he went through the window . . .*"

He wanted a friend. He wanted Charles. Charles would know what to do. Charles would deal with these bullying louts.

" . . . *there was a man . . . he went through the window . . .*"

And Charles was thousands of miles away.

The nightmare went on. The questions. First in the room where men — not in uniform now — worked over the horror on the floor, muttering to each other, measuring, flashing lights, pointing cameras, scribbling in notebooks.

Then in another room, after a hellish, siren-screaming journey in a crowded car. Questions, questions. All framed with the certainty, the *knowledge*, that he had done what he must not admit having done.

Questions. And the white light

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aching in his eyes. His throat stiff and his lips unmanageable. His whole body shaking, shaking. The inside of his head shaking too.

— Why did you kill her?

— What time did you kill her?

— What did you kill her for?

— How long after ya killed her before you run out?

— *I didn't. I didn't . . . there was a man . . . he went through the window . . .*

— All right — so there was a man. An' he went outa the window. Whaddud he do? Jump? Fly?

— You don't expect us to swallow that, do you?

— Yeah. How d'ya figure this sorta hooey's goin' to help?

— *I tell you there was a man . . . he went through the window . . . Down the fire escape . . .*

— He did? Leavin' your prints all over the poker?

— Yeah. An' splashin' her blood all over ya?

— Now, listen, Mr. Morse: it's completely certain that you killed this woman. The evidence is overwhelming. Can't you realize that you're doing yourself no good by your attitude?

— *I'm telling the truth. There was a man. I — I was in the bathroom. I heard a noise. I ran in. I saw Astrid. There was a man. He climbed out of the window. I'm telling the truth.*

— Very well. So you're telling the truth. Which window did this man go out?

— Yeah? And how come he locked it behind him?

— Never mind that, Mr. Morse. Answer the other question. Which window?

— *I — I don't know . . . The window in the — the end wall . . . Next the fire escape . . .*

— Which window? The right as you face? Or the left?

— Yeah. Which? One of 'em was locked, bud. Which?

Questions. And the light. Questions all around him. Questions from faces. Coarse, brutal faces. Sharp fox-faces. They began to associate themselves with the voices.

And another face with wise gray eyes that watched him always. A face with no voice. A face in the corner. A face more to be feared than all the faces with voices.

Questions. And the light. Time standing still, immobilized. He had always been here. He would always be here.

It was a pattern, diabolic and infinite: Fear — questions — fear fear — light — fear fear fear — fatigue.

Fatigue. First a dull dead core of exhaustion, but now beginning to reach out all around itself, encroaching more and more on all other feeling.

Until even fear was going . . . going . . . almost gone —

— Why don't we wind this up, Morse?

— Yes. We know you killed her, and you know we know. Why not get it over with?

— Yeah. How's about it, fella? Why doncha come clean, so's we can let up on ya?

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Fear flickering again, momentarily reborn.

— *I didn't I didn't I didn't . . . There was a man. When I ran in, he was climbing out of the window . . .*

For an instant a picture forming behind his eyes. An image of Charles — tall, tough, elegant, dangerous, one shoulder lifting higher than the other, a cigarette jutting from the corner of his long mouth, his creased face creasing more in a mastering smile. Charles coming through the door, being suddenly framed in the doorway, standing and looking down at the faces, the stupid crafty animal faces —

Then his eyes closing. His head falling forward. Then nothing. Except the hard scratched feeling of the table-top against his cheek. And a ghost smell of soap and pencils and agony.

A rough hand biting into his shoulder. Shaking. His head lolling, jerking back and forward like a marionette's —

Then a new voice, quiet, sharp, charged with authority.

— That's enough. Let him alone. Schraff, you go find Doctor Innes. This isn't any Bowery bum you're handling.

His head resting on the table again. The voices muttering all around him, not thrusting at him now.

Consciousness of someone standing over him. Not touching him. Just standing.

Opening his eyes. Forcing muscles to roll up the ton-weight lids. Seeing the wise gray eyes looking down at him, contemplating him, understanding everything.

Staring dully up into the gray eyes for a moment, dully wondering. Then letting the heavy lids fold down over his own eyes again.

The door opening, and brisk footsteps. And quick impersonal hands upon him. Doctor's hands. Feeling at his temples, his wrist. Tilting back his unbearably heavy head, with a deft thumb rolling back those eyelids.

Then muttering above his head. His coat being eased off, shirt-sleeve rolled up.

Indefinite pause — and then the fingers on his arm, and the sting of the needle . . .

When he waked it was to grayness. A gray blanket over him; gray walls; a door of gray bars; gray light filtering through a small grilled window.

For some timeless interval the drug held memory in check. But at last, with a sick gray emptiness in his stomach, recollection came. And fear again, all the worse because its edges were dulled now and instead of it being so intense that there was no room in him for other emotions, it was now entangled and heightened by remorse and shame and horror.

He threw off the blanket and swung his feet to the floor and propped his elbows on his knees and dropped his face into his hands.

There was a clanging sound, and he started convulsively and raised his head and saw a uniformed guard coming into the cell. The man was carry-

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ing a big suitcase which he put down as he closed the barred door. On the side of the case were the initials *C.M.*, and Cyprian saw with dull surprise that it was his own, the one Charles had given him in London. He heard himself saying, "Where did you get that?" and the fellow looked at him and said, "Came from y'r apartment. There's clothes an' shaving tack an' setra." He had a strange manner, at once meaning and noncommittal, official and yet faintly sycophantic.

He came closer to Cyprian and looked down at him. He said, "Mr. Friar fixed it. An' about sendin' out for what you want."

A little faint glow of warmth came to life somewhere in Cyprian's coldness. Trust John Friar, he thought.

The guard said, "You like anything now? Breakfast? Or just coffee?"

Cyprian went on staring at him: it was as if his mind was so full that he didn't hear words until long after they had been spoken.

"Coffee," he said at last. "Just coffee."

The man nodded, and went to the door and opened it again, and paused. "Like to see the papers?" he said over his shoulder.

This time the words penetrated fast. Cyprian recoiled from them as if they were blows. "No!" he said. "No — *no!*"

He closed his eyes and held them screwed shut until he had heard the door open and clang shut, and then receding footsteps echoing. A shudder shook him at the thought of newspapers, and once more he covered his face with his hands. Headlines — as if on an endless ticker-tape — began to unroll behind his eyes, running the gamut from the sober through the sensational to the nadir of the tabloid —

*— FAMOUS PLAYWRIGHT HELD ON MURDER CHARGE. DESIGNER SLAIN . . .*

*— CYPRIAN MORSE ARRAIGNED FOR MURDER. GIRL ASSOCIATE BRUTALLY BATTERED TO DEATH . . .*

*— PARK AVENUE LOVE-FIEND MURDER. FAMOUS THEATER BEAUTY SLASHED. MORSE, BROADWAY FIGURE, JAILED . . .*

He groaned and twisted his body this way and that and desperately pressed the heels of his palms against his eyes until a spark-shot red mist seemed to swim under the lids. But the tape went on unrolling — a ceaseless stream of words.

He jumped up and began to pad about the cell — and then mercifully heard footsteps in the corridor again and mastered himself and was sitting on the edge of the gray cot when the guard reappeared with a tray.

He mumbled thanks and reached for the coffee pot. But his hand trembled so badly that, without speaking, the man filled a cup for him.

He drank greedily, and felt strength coming back to him. He looked up and said, "Can I — would — is it allowed to send a cablegram?"

"Could be. With an okay from the

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Warden's office." The fellow reached into a pocket, produced a little memo-pad and a stump of pencil. "Want to write it down?"

Cyprian took the things. Once more he mumbled thanks. He didn't look at the man; he didn't like his eyes. He began to write, not having to think, letting the pencil print the words —

— *Charles de Lastro Hotel Castilia Venezuela In terrible trouble need you desperately please come Reply care John Friar Cyprian.*

He handed the pad and pencil back, and watched while what he had written was read. He said, "Well —?" and met the eyes again as they flickered over him.

"Seems like this'll be okay." The guard turned a blue-clad back and went to the door. "I'll look after it."

Once more the clanging, the footsteps dying away — and Cyprian was alone again. His hand steadier now, he poured himself more coffee. Anything, any action, to keep him from thought.

He drained the cup. He picked up the suitcase and set it on the cot and opened it. Forcing himself to activity, he washed and shaved and put on the clothes he found packed. A suit of dark blue flannel — a white silk shirt — a plain maroon tie.

He felt a little better. It was easier to believe that this was Cyprian Morse — and he gave silent thanks to John Friar.

But there was nothing to do now — and if he weren't careful he might have to start thinking. He lit a cigarette from the box in the suitcase and began to pace the cell. There were five steps one way and six the other . . .

So this was Cyprian Morse. Perhaps he didn't feel better after all. Perhaps —

Footsteps in the corridor again. One, two, three sets.

John Friar himself, with another man and the guard. Who opened the door, and stood aside to let the visitors in, and clanged the door shut.

John Friar took Cyprian's hand in both of his and gripped hard. He was white-faced, strained. He looked less like a successful producer than ever, and more like a truncated and careworn Abe Lincoln. The man with him towered over him, a lank, loose-limbed, stooping giant with a thatch of white hair and a seamed, unlikely face which was neither saint's nor gargoyle's but something of both.

John Friar said, "Cyprian!" in a voice which wasn't quite steady. He made a gesture including the third man. He said, "Julius, meet Cyprian Morse . . . Cyprian, this is Julius Magnussen."

Again Cyprian's hand was taken, and enveloped in a vast paw which gripped firmly but with surprising gentleness. And Cyprian found himself looking up, tall though he was, into dark unreadable eyes which seemed jet-black under the shaggy white brows.

John Friar said, "Julius is taking on your def — your case, Cyprian. And you know what that means!"

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"I most definitely do!" Cyprian hoped they wouldn't hear the trembling in his throat. "Is there anyone in America who doesn't?"

Magnussen grunted. He turned away and folded his length in the middle and sat on the edge of the gray bed. He looked at Cyprian and said, "Better tell me about it," then moved a little and added, "Sit down here."

Cyprian found himself obeying. But he couldn't keep on meeting the dark eyes, and gave up trying to. He looked up at John Friar and essayed a smile. He said, "Of course," in Magnussen's direction — and then, faintly, all the fear and horror of memory breaking loose in his head again, "Where — where — d'you want me to start?"

"At the beginning, Mr. Morse," Magnussen said, and Cyprian drew a deep breath to still the quaking inside him.

But it wouldn't be stilled. It spread from his body to his mind. He was being thrust into nightmare again —

— I can't . . . I can't . . .

— Would it be easier if I asked you questions?

Questions. The pattern returning. Fear — questions — fear fear — fatigue. But worse now. Hiding from friends not enemies.

— I have to ask you this: did you kill this woman Astrid Halmar?

— No — no — no! . . . *There was a man . . . he went through the window . . .*

— You know of no enemies Miss Halmar might have had?

— No. How should I? I —

— So you think the murderer was a stranger, a prowler?

— How — how do I know what he was! Or who! I don't know anything . . .

Questions. Questions. Fear. Thinking furiously before each answer without letting the pause be evident. Trying to screen the vortex of his mind with caution. Time standing still again. He had always been here. He would always be here.

— So you were in the bathroom for more than an hour?

— Yes — yes. I went there just after dinner. Just as — just after the maid left the apartment.

— Were you feeling unwell? Is that why you stayed so long? Had something you ate upset your stomach?

A straw. A solid straw. Snatch it!

— Yes. That's right. I was sick . . . It was the oysters . . .

More questions. More fear. Feeling the dark eyes always on his face. Not meeting them.

— And you were just about to come out of the bathroom when you heard a cry? Am I right?

Another straw. Snatch it!

— Yes. Yes. Astrid screamed . . .

— And you ran out, and along the passage to the living-room?

— Yes.

— While you were running along the passage, did you happen to notice Miss Halmar's robe, lying on the floor?

— Robe? What — no, I don't think —

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— Her robe was found by the door to the living-room. The killer — however he gained entry to the apartment — must have struggled with her, snatched at her, in the passageway there, pulling off the robe as she fled into the living-room. I am wondering — did you notice it?

A straw?

— I think I did. There was something — soft on the floor. It caught my shoe . . .

— Now, Mr. Morse, as you entered the living-room, you saw the figure of a man just disappearing out of the window?

— Yes. Yes.

— And you saw Miss Halmar's body on the floor and ran to it?

— Yes. Of course I did. I — I had to try and help her . . .

— Naturally. Now, as your fingerprints are on the log-pick, Mr. Morse, you must have handled it? Maybe you touched it — picked it up — when you went to her? It was in your way, was it?

A sudden lightening. As if some frightful pressure were easing. Fear actually receding. Knowing now that these were no accidental straws, but material for a raft. A life-raft.

— Yes. That was it. I remember now. It — it was lying across her body. I — I picked it up and — threw it down, away from her.

— And in your shock and horror, when you found she was dead, you forgot the telephone and ran blindly out to seek help, and then collapsed?

— Yes. Yes. That's it — exactly.

Questions. Questions. But not minding them now. Being eager for them. And being able to meet the dark eyes, keeping his own eyes on them.

The pattern had changed. Fear was there, as a permanent lowering background, but in front of it was hope . . .

The hope persisted, even when he was alone once more. It seemed to widen the cell, and raise its roof. It set the blood flowing through his head again, so that his brain worked fast and clear and he started to elaborate on the structure Julius Magnussen had begun to build for him.

This work — and work it was — carried him through the dragging days and weeks with a surprising minimum of anguish. It even fortified him to some extent against the shock of the answering cablegram from Charles, which didn't arrive until several days after he had expected it.

The cable ran: *Hospitalized bad kickup malaria Flying back immediately released maybe two weeks Hang on Charles.*

And that, of course, was bad news. Bad from two angles — that he would have to wait before Charles could get to him, that poor Charles was sick.

But whereas, before the first meeting with Julius Magnussen, Cyprian would have been crushed almost to extinction by these twin misfortunes, now they seemed merely to serve as a spur to his fortitude and his hope and his labor. So that he clenched his teeth

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and redoubled his efforts to produce appropriate "memories" — until he reached the point of being sure that at least Friar and Magnussen believed him, that he almost believed himself.

But it was as well for him that he wasn't present at any of the several meetings between Julius Magnussen and John Friar alone, or he would have heard talk which would have turned his hope-lightened purgatory into hopeless hell.

— A bad case, John. Don't hide it from yourself. We'll need a miracle.

— Good God, Julius, d'you mean you yourself don't believe —

— Stop. That's not a question I want to be asked. Or answer. Leave it at what I said. A bad case. No case at all.

— But the evidence against him's all circumstantial!

— And therefore the best, in spite of what they say in novels.

— But surely it's all open to two interpretations! Like — like his fingerprints on that poker.

— *And* the splashes of blood on him and his clothing? Have you thought of that, John? *Splashes.* Not smears, which are what should be there from raising her, examining her, trying to help her . . .

— But the boy's *gentle*, Julius! There's no violence in him. He couldn't even kill a fly that was pestering him.

— Maybe not. And don't think that's not going to be used. For more than all it's worth. For God's sake, it's practically all we have! You know the young man, John: tell me, how would he react to the suggestion of an alternative plea?

— You mean "not guilty, or guilty by reason of insanity"! — that gag! Good God, Julius — he wouldn't go for that if you tortured him.

— H'mm. I was afraid that would be the answer.

— Look now, what is all this? What are you trying to do — tell me you won't take the case after all? Is that it?

— Cool off, John. I'm trying to save your prodigy's life, that's all.

— I don't get this! Julius Magnussen, of all people, scared of a set-up like this! . . . Remember that police photograph you showed me? Well, think of it. Not the head wounds, the others. Think of 'em! Cyprian could not have been responsible for that frightful *sort* of brutality. Think of what was done to that girl, man! . . . Can't you see — can't you?

— Oh, yes, John, I can see. A great many things . . .

But Cyprian knew nothing of such conversations, and it seemed to him, every time he saw his counsel, that more and more confidence radiated from that towering, loose-limbed figure; that the penetrating dark eyes looked always more cheerful.

So he rode out the rest of the dragging days and nights and came in good enough order to the morning when the trial was to open. It was a Thursday, and he liked that because he had had a fancy, since an episode

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in his boyhood, that Thor's was his lucky day. Further, a bright autumnal sun was glittering over New York and even — a rare occurrence in the weeks he had been there — pushing rays through the bars of the small window high up in the wall of the cell.

He dressed with great, almost finicking care. He drank a whole pot of coffee and then sent for more. He even ate a little of his breakfast.

He was ready and waiting a full half-hour before they came for him. He spent it pacing the cell, smoking too much and too fast, glancing occasionally toward the pile of letters which he hadn't read and had no more intention of ever reading than he had of looking in court at any of the reporters' faces. He didn't think of what was before him today. He daren't think of that, in the same way — only infinitely multiplied — that he never thought about what was coming on a first night.

So he considered, with furious intensity, anything and everything except what was coming. The sure hope at the back of his mind must be kept inviolate.

He came naturally to thoughts of Charles. Every day he had been sure this must be the day when he would hear again — and every day he had been disappointed. He had wired again, and he had written — just a note which John Friar had airmailed for him. But still no answer. Charles must be very ill indeed. Or — a wonderful idea which he dare not dwell upon for more than one delicious instant — Charles was well again and had arrived in New York, and was on his way here.

The third alternative he shuddered away from. The thought of Charles dead was so black, so bleak, so dreadful, that it would have driven him back in escape to thoughts of the immediate future if he hadn't been saved by the arrival of his guard.

For once he was glad to see the fellow. He said, "Do we start now?" and moved towards the door.

But the man shook his head. "They ain't here yet," he said. "Take it easy." He drew a folded yellow envelope from a pocket and held it out to Cyprian. "Sent over from Friar's," he said. "He reckoned you might like to have it right away."

Cyprian almost snatched it from the outstretched hand. His heart was pounding, and sudden color had tinged his pallid face. With fingers which he didn't know were shaking, he fumbled at the flimsy envelope, ripped it open at last, and unfolded the sheet it contained.

And read: *Better Out next Wednesday will fly arriving Thursday Charles.*

The new color deepened in Cyprian's face. He read the cable again — and again. Here was the best of all possible omens. Almost as good as his wild daydream of a few moments before — that perhaps Charles would arrive in person. On second thought, perhaps better. Because now he was supremely confident, and he would so far prefer to have all this ugliness behind him when Charles returned; out

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of sight and wrapped up and put away, to be disinterred and examined, if ever, at a safe distance in time and then only for personal historic interest.

He moved his shoulders unconsciously, as if in reflex to the removal of a heavy weight. He folded the strip of paper carefully, and stowed it away in his breast pocket. And then looked at the guard and smiled, and said softly, "Thank you. Thank you very much . . ."

There was a tramping of feet in the corridor — and two uniformed men he had never seen before. One of them pushed the cell door wide and looked at him with no expression and said, "All set?"

Cyprian smiled at this man too, and walked out into the corridor quickly, lightly, almost jauntily . . .

But there was no lightness in him when he came back eight hours later, and no square of sunshine from the barred window. There was only night outside and here the hard cold light of the single bulb overhead.

His face was lined and wax-white. His shoulders sagged and his body seemed not to fill his clothes. He lurched on his feet while they opened the door of the cell, and one of the men gripped his arm and said, "Take it easy."

They put him inside and he dropped on the edge of his cot and sat there limp and head-hanging, his eyes wide and staring at the floor and not seeing it.

The escort went away and his own guard came, and sometime later the doctor. He couldn't get food down, and they put him to bed and gave him a sedative. He slept almost at once, and they left him.

He lay like a log for three hours, until the deadly numbness of fatigue had gone and the drug had eased its grip. And then he began to murmur and thrash around on the cot — and in a moment gave a harsh choked cry and sat upright, awake.

He remembered. He tried not to, he fought, but he couldn't stop memory from working. He remembered everything — at first in jumbled pictures, then in echoing phrases; at last, concentrated upon the gray-haired, gray-eyed figure of the District Attorney, he recalled the whole of the clear and ruthlessly dispassionate Opening for the Prosecution. The speech which, period by period, point by careful point, had not only stripped Cyprian Morse of all cover but had shattered all remnant of hope in him.

What had happened after the speech didn't matter. The irreparable damage to Cyprian Morse, the conviction of Cyprian Morse, had been brought about; those witnesses, the silly endless procession of them who answered silly endless questions, they were just so many more nails in his coffin. After the speech, which showed such complete, such eerie knowledge and understanding, as if the speaker had not only seen everything that had happened but had seen it with Cyprian's mind and Cyprian's eyes —

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after that, all else seemed time-prolonging and sadistically anticlimactic . . .

He didn't move. He sat as he was, and stared into the abyss . . .

Morning came, and daylight, and people he heard and saw as if from a long distance. He moved then but was almost unconscious of moving. It was as if his body were an automaton and his mind a separate entity outside it, which had no concern with the robot movements.

The automaton clothed itself, and ate and drank, and went with his mind and the uniformed men and sat in the crowded courtroom in the same place as his undivided self had sat the day before.

The automaton sat still and went through motions — of listening to friends and Counsel, of answering them when necessary, of looking attentive to the gabber-jab of the unending witnesses, of considering thoughtfully the Closing speech for the Prosecution, of hearing the crabbed Judge rule that the Court, this being Friday, should recess until the morning of Monday . . .

But his mind, his actual self, was in hell without a permit. For sixty-two hours the automaton made all the foolish gestures of living; for uncountable stages of distorted time his mind gazed into the pit.

The Monday came, and the automaton moved accordingly. But the clean-cut edges of the schism between body and mind began to waver before the two parts of him left the cell, as if something had happened which demanded they should be joined again. Resisting the pull, his mind began to wonder what had caused it. His refusal to see John Friar or Magnussen during the recess? The odd, almost excited manner of his guard on bringing a newspaper to the cell and trying to insist on the automaton reading it? The looks which both his escorts cast at the automaton in the car on the way to court?

He didn't want the union. He would break, he felt, if he couldn't keep up the separation. But the pull grew stronger with every foot of the way, and almost irresistible as he entered the courtroom itself, and his mind felt a difference — a strange, disturbing, agitated alteration — in the other minds behind the faces staring at him.

And then, with a shivering, nauseating shock, his resistance went and he was swept back into his body once more, so that he was stripped and next to the world again with no transparent armor between.

It was the face of Magnussen's wizened clerk which brought it about, a face which always before had been harassed and grave and filled with foreboding, but which now was gay and eager and irradiated by a tremendous gnome-like smile. As Cyprian was about to take his seat, this smile was turned full on him, and his hand was surreptitiously taken and earnestly squeezed, and through the smile a voice came whispering something which couldn't be distinguished

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but all the same was pregnant with the most extreme importance.

Cyprian sat down, weakly. In one again, he had no strength. He looked up into the little clerk's face and muttered something — he wasn't sure of the words himself.

An astonished change came over the puckered visage. "Mr. Morse!" The voice cracked in amazement. "Do you mean to say you haven't *heard!*"

Dumbly Cyprian shook his head, the small movement leaving him exhausted.

"Not about the — the other killings! . . . Mr. Morse! There have been two more murders of unfortunate girls! In every respect the same as Miss Halmar's — even the — the mutilations identical . . . On Saturday night the first victim was found; and another discovered in the early hours of this morning!"

Cyprian went on staring up into the excited, agitated face.

"D-don't you realize what this m-means!" The voice was stammering now. "All three deaths must be linked. *You* couldn't have caused the others! They're the work of a maniac — a Jack the Ripper!" Fluttering hands produced a newspaper, unfolded it, waved it. "Look here, Mr. Morse!"

There were black heavy headlines. They wavered in front of Cyprian's eyes, then focused sharply and made him catch at his breath.

*POLICE CLUELESS IN NEW FIEND SLAYINGS! MORSE RELEASE DEMANDED BY PUBLIC!*

"Oh," said Cyprian, his lips barely moving. "Oh, I see . . ." His whole body began to tingle, as if circulation had been withheld from it until now. He said, a little louder, "What — what will happen?"

The clerk sat down beside him. His hoarse whispering was as clear now as a shout in Cyprian's ears. "What will happen? I'll tell you, Mr. Morse. I'll tell you exactly. The D.A. will withdraw — and not long after Mr. Magnussen's opened. He'll withdraw, Mr. Morse, you mark my words!"

The words coincided with a stentorian bellow from the back of the courtroom, followed by a stamping rustle as everyone stood up — and Justice swept to its throne in a dusty black robe . . .

And Cyprian, life welling up in him, found himself caught in a whirling timeless jumble of fact and feeling and emotion, a maelstrom which was in effect the precise opposite of the long nightmare succeeding his arrest —

Julius Magnussen towering on his feet, speaking of Cyprian Morse's innocence with an almost contemptuous certainty. Julius Magnussen examining detectives on the witness stand, forcing them to prove all three killings had been identical. Julius Magnussen calling more witnesses, then looking around haughtily at the Prosecution when the Court was asked to hear a statement. The District Attorney himself, gray eyes not understanding now but puzzled and confused, muttering that the State

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withdrew its case against Cyprian Morse. The Judge speaking, bestowing commiseration on Cyprian Morse, laudation on Julius Magnussen, censure upon their opponents —

Then bedlam breaking loose, himself the center. Friends. Strangers. Acquaintances. Reporters. All crowding, jabbering, laughing. Women weeping. Flashbulbs exploding. John Friar pumping both his hands. Magnussen clapping him on the shoulder. Himself the center of a wedge of policemen, struggling for the exit. An odd little instant of comparative quiet in the hallway, and hearing Magnussen say to John Friar behind him, "An apology, John, you were right."

Then John's big car, and the soft cushioned seat supporting him. And quietness, with the tires singing on the road and time to draw breath — and taste freedom . . .

All horror was behind him and it was Wednesday evening and Cyprian was coming home. From John Friar's house in Westchester, in John Friar's car, driven by John Friar's chauffeur.

It was deepening dusk when they pulled into the parking lot behind the apartment house. Cyprian peered, and saw no sign of any human being and was pleased. He got out and smiled at the chauffeur and said warmly, "Thank you, Maurice. Thank you very much . . ." and thrust a lavish tip into the man's gloved hand and waved a cheerful salute and walked off toward the rear entrance of the building. His footsteps rang crisply on the concrete, and a faint, wraith-like mist from his breathing hung on the autumn air. He suppressed an impulse to stop and crane his neck to look up to the penthouse and see the warm lights glowing out from it. He knew they were there, because he had heard John Friar telephoning to his servant, telling him when Mr. Morse was to be expected.

Good old John, he thought. Thoughtful John! And then forgot John completely as he entered the service door, and still met no one and found one of the service elevators empty and waiting.

He forgot John. He forgot everyone and everything — except Charles.

And Charles would be here tomorrow. That was why Cyprian had insisted upon coming home tonight — so that he could supervise preparation.

He hurried the elevator with his mind, and when it reached the rear hallway of his penthouse, threw open the gate — and was faced, not by light and an open door and Walter's white-smiling black face, but by cold unwelcoming darkness.

He stepped out of the elevator and groped for the light-switch and pressed it and blinked at the sudden glare. Frowning, he tried the door to the kitchen. It wasn't locked, but when he opened it there was more darkness. And no sound. No sound at all.

A chill settled on his mind. The warm excited glow which had been growing inside him evaporated with

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unnerving suddenness. He switched on more lights and went quickly through the bright-tiled neatness and threw open an inner door and called, "Walter! Walter, where are you?" into more darkness still.

Not such absolute darkness this time, but the more disturbing for that. The curtains across the big windows at the west side of the living-room had not been drawn and there was still a sort of gray luminosity in the air.

Cyprian took two or three paces into the room. He called, "Walter!" again, and heard his own voice go up too high at the end of the word.

And another voice spoke from behind him — a cracked and casual voice.

"I sent him out for an hour or two," it said. "Hope you don't mind."

Cyprian started violently. He gasped, "*Charles!*" and wheeled around and saw a tall figure looming in the grayness. His heart pounded in his ears and he felt a swaying in his head.

There was no answering sound — and he said, "Charles!" again and moved toward a table near the figure and reached out for the lamp he knew was on it.

But his shoulder was caught in a grip which checked him completely. Long fingers strong as steel bit into his flesh, and Charles's voice said, "Take it easy. We don't need light just yet."

Cyprian felt cold. His head still whirled. He couldn't understand, and the grip on his shoulder seemed to be paralyzing him and he was afraid with that worst of all fears which hasn't any shape.

He said wildly, "Charles, I don't understand — I —" and couldn't get out any more words. He contorted all the muscles in his face in a useless attempt to see Charles's face.

"You will," said Charles's voice. "Do you remember once telling me you'd never lie to me again?"

"Yes," Cyprian whispered — and then, his mouth drying with fear, "Let me go. You're hurting me . . ."

"Did you mean it?" The hand didn't relax its grip.

"Of course . . . And I never have lied to you since! I don't understand —"

"You will." The grip tightened and Cyprian caught his breath. "I want a truthful answer to one question. Will you give it?"

"Yes. Yes. Of course I will . . ."

"Did you kill that Halmar woman?"

"No — no — *there was a man. . . he went through the window . . .*"

"I thought you weren't going to lie to me. Did you kill her?"

"*No!* I —" The steel fingers bit deeper and Cyprian sobbed.

"Did you kill her? Don't lie to me."

"Yes! *Yes!*" Cyprian's face was writhing. His eyes stung with tears and his lips were trembling. "Yes, I killed her! I killed her — *I killed her!* . . ."

The grip eased. The hand lifted from his shoulder. He tottered on uncertain feet, and the lamp on the table jumped suddenly into life and

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through the mist over his eyes he saw Charles for the first time — and then heard Charles's voice say, easily and softly and with the old-time chuckle hidden somewhere in it:

"Well, that's that. Just so long as we know . . . I'd like a drink." He turned away from Cyprian and crossed with his lounging walk to the bar — the lounging walk which always reminded Cyprian of the stalking of a cat —

And suddenly Cyprian knew.

He knew, and in the same moment that understanding flooded his mind, he thought — for the first time actively thought — of those other two deaths which had saved him from death.

A scream came to his throat and froze there. He shrank into himself as he stood there — and Charles turned and looked at him.

His eyes burned in his head. He couldn't move their gaze from Charles's face. He said:

"You did it. You killed those two women. You weren't ill. You got someone else to send those cables. You heard about Astrid and you flew back without anyone knowing. And you plotted and planned and stalked — and did that. As if they were animals. You did that!"

His voice died in his throat. All strength went out of him and he tottered to a chair and doubled up in it and sat crumpled.

"Don't fret, my dear Cyprian." Charles drank, looking at him over the rim of the glass. "We sit tight — and live happily ever after . . ."

Cyprian dropped his head into his hands.

"Oh, my God!" he said. "Oh, my God!"

## NEXT MONTH . . .

*ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE* will bring you:

CORNELL WOOLRICH'S *The Heavy Sugar*
FRANCIS BONNAMY'S *The Loaded House*
W. R. BURNETT'S *Round Trip*
VERONICA PARKER JOHNS'S *Bezique of Death*
ROY VICKERS'S *The Respectful Murder*

and six other tales of crime, detection, and suspense, including another *EQMM* "first story":

EDWARD G. ASHTON'S *Cameron's Cave*

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# DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

*H. C. Kincaid's "Murder on a Bet" is one of the eight "first stories" which were awarded special prizes in last year's contest. Dr. Kincaid's story is ultra-contemporary, and for that reason we could not resist bringing it to you. . . . Perhaps you read recently how a Hollywood studio planned to make a picture about a gigantic bank theft. The working-title was "The Million Dollar Robbery." But then some studio executives decided that the amount of the loot was too large, that no one would believe it in these days of super-law-enforcement. So the title was changed to "The $500,000 Robbery" — on the theory, no doubt, that the public would swallow half the original grandiose conception. Then something happened — in real life, and in, of all places, Boston. The $1,000,000 Brink robbery occurred and drove international crises off the front page. The studio executives went into a huddle, and emerged with a new title for their picture. It was now called, with mercenary modesty, "The $2,000,000 Robbery"! . . . The point is that Dr. Kincaid's story has the stuff of tomorrow's news — and by tomorrow we don't mean the distant future, we mean literally the day after today.*

*"Murder on a Bet" is Dr. Kincaid's first published story, and Dr. Kincaid is 67 years old. We wonder which encourages us the more — printing a first story by a writer still in his teens, or printing a first story by a writer in his sixties. Whichever is the bigger thrill, we doff our detectival derby to the daring, determined doctor . . . Born in West Virginia, Dr. Kincaid had no schooling other than a course at Medical College (Baltimore Medical, now University of Maryland). Prior to entering Medical College he worked as a stenographer, bookkeeper, railway passenger clerk, freight clerk, salesman, fireman, used-car dealer and typewriter repairman. At present Dr. Kincaid is retired, but for the past twelve years he has been Medical Consultant of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.*

## MURDER ON A BET

*by H. C. KINCAID*

THE afternoon papers of the 8th played it up with scare headlines and scare facts: *JOHN HENDRIX PASSES; WEALTHY MANUFACTURER FOUND DEAD IN HOTEL. John Hendrix, a well known figure in financial circles throughout the country, was found dead this morning*



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*in the suite which he had been occupying for the last week at the Grand Hotel. The body was discovered by a group of his business associates, with whom he had arranged a conference at ten o'clock. No details are as yet available. . . .*

The next morning's editions continued the headlines, with a few more details and considerably more speculation; and by afternoon there was only a half-stick, inside. But Wednesday afternoon, the 10th, the *Banner* asked, across the front page:

*WAS IT MURDER ON A BET?*

"Doc" Kay seldom read the papers — in fact, he had been content for some years to putter around in his laboratory, except when it became necessary to concern himself with mundane affairs for financial reasons. One of those times was rapidly approaching, and Doc concealed his irritation when the phone rang, and a voice announced: "Hal Green, Doc. Would you be interested in a $10,000 fee?"

"For that much money," replied Doc, "I will postpone everything else for as much as a week, if necessary."

Half an hour later four men entered Doc's office. Harold Green, who had just called, was an old friend, and proceeded to introduce his companions. Green himself was a prominent steel man — Lanks, a coal operator — Gilman, a broker — and Runyon, a bank president. As businessmen they came quickly to the point, Green acting as spokesman.

"You have seen the newspaper accounts of the death of John Hendrix, of course. The Coroner says he died of natural causes. We hope he is right but we do not believe it. On the other hand, we know it could not have been suicide, and we fear it was murder. If it was murder, we may be implicated. It is worth $10,000 to us to know, as soon as possible, whether John Hendrix was murdered — and if so, how."

Doc Kay leaned back in his chair. "Tell me what you know about it."

It turned out that the newspaper account was surprisingly accurate — up to a point. It had all begun with a chance meeting some three weeks earlier, when six men lunched together at the Malunion Club. In addition to Doc's four clients, there had been present John Hendrix, the deceased, a clothing manufacturer, and Victor Julian, head of a large pharmaceutical establishment. All were millionaires and to some extent business rivals, and the six had only two things in common: an almost fanatical respect for the pledged word, and a predilection for murder mysteries. An argument had been sparked by a recent issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, which contained a "locked room" story. Hendrix had vigorously denounced stories of this kind, since, as he maintained, murder under the conditions stated was impossible, and the solution always depended on trickery. The voice of Julian cut sharply into the tirade. "Don't be too sure of that, John."

Julian had spoken without raising his voice, but something in his tone

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arrested the attention of the others. After a shocked pause, Hendrix replied, in a rather patronizing manner: "No doubt such a master mind as yours could devise a method of murder without the use of any mechanical device or any deception of the senses. But I repeat that for us ordinary mortals it is impossible."

Julian smiled. "I have no doubt whatever of my ability to construct such a problem, but as you can all readily see, an actual demonstration would be necessary, and leaving all conscientious scruples aside, it would be difficult to find a willing victim; unless, John, you wish to volunteer your services as guinea pig. Perhaps you'd even like to make a small bet."

Hendrix immediately agreed, and $150,000 was fixed as the stakes. They had left Hendrix and Julian discussing details, after an agreement that all six men should meet on the evening of Thursday, the first.

Green paused. The other men edged forward on their chairs. Doc remained silent, and Green continued.

"We met as arranged, and it soon became apparent that what we had considered a joke was being taken in deadly earnest by Julian and Hendrix. Two agreements had been drawn up in sextuplicate, each of which was signed by both principals and witnessed by us. I have copies here."

Doc Kay took the papers without comment, and began to read one of them carefully:

"*THIS AGREEMENT*, made and entered into this first day of September, 1949, between John Hendrix and Victor Julian, Witnesseth: that whereas, there has arisen between the parties a dispute as to the feasibility of certain actions under a given set of circumstances, and whereas, this dispute may be resolved only by experiment, now, therefore, the parties bind themselves to act according to the following stipulations, with the provision that whichever shall prove his contentions shall be entitled to sole ownership of a certain package of unregistered bonds which is to be placed in escrow under a separate agreement, in the custody of Arthur Runyon, President of the 88th National Bank.

"Stipulation 1: John Hendrix agrees that on the evening of Thursday, September 1, he will enter a suite in one of the three principal hotels in this city, which he shall have stocked with sufficient food and drink for one week. Telephone service to this suite shall be completely discontinued. The windows and doors shall be locked from within the suite, and the doors also locked from without. Strips of adhesive shall be placed on all doors and windows, within and without, so that any attempt to gain ingress or egress by any person or by any means may be determined. Hendrix further agrees to make no effort to leave this suite and not to communicate voluntarily with any person until the suite shall be opened in the presence of two or more of the witnesses hereto, on the morning of Thursday, September 8, at 9 o'clock, standard time.

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"Stipulation 2: Victor Julian agrees that he will make no attempt to learn in which hotel Hendrix is located, before 9 a.m., Friday, September 2, after which hour he shall be at liberty to use whatever methods he may choose to prove his contentions.

"Stipulation 3: Violation of these stipulations by either party shall immediately forfeit his interest in the escrowed property to the other party."

Doc Kay laid the paper aside, and turned his attention to the other:

"We, John Hendrix and Victor Julian, co-owners of a certain package marked J H V J, and sealed with four wax seals, do hereby personally and jointly deliver said package to Arthur Runyon, President of the 88th National Bank, to be by him held in escrow until the hour of noon, Thursday, September 15, at which time he shall deliver it to John Hendrix, if living; but in the event John Hendrix shall be deceased, then the said package shall be delivered to Victor Julian, or to his order."

This paper also bore the signatures of Hendrix and Julian, witnessed by the other four.

"Now," said Doc, "forget about the newspaper accounts, and tell me exactly what happened."

There was no disagreement as to details. Green and Lanks had accompanied Hendrix to the hotel which he had selected, and personally verified the condition of the suite, except, of course, the sealing to be done by Hendrix from the inside. Hendrix had taken the added precaution of employing a reputable detective agency to keep a guard on duty at all times in the corridor outside the suite, which was located on the sixth floor. The hotel walls were sheer, and entrance through a window was obviously impossible.

Gilman and Runyon, in the meantime, had remained with Julian until he had been taken to the hospital. Doc sat up. "The papers said nothing about Julian being ill."

"That," replied Runyon, "is one of the screwiest things about the whole affair. Just before Hendrix left, Julian pulled a flask from his pocket and poured two drinks. Each man emptied his glass, and they shook hands. Julian's flask was practically empty, and he left it on the table. Incidentally, I retrieved it later and sent it down to the police laboratory, but they reported no poison."

Doc asked curtly: "Well, what happened? Why did Julian go to a hospital?"

Under Doc's questioning, it developed that Gilman, Runyon, and Julian had sat around for about two hours, when Julian took a cigar from his pocket, remarking that it had been given him by Hendrix that afternoon — "the last cigar he'll ever give away." Julian clipped the cigar with his penknife, lighted it, and smoked for a few minutes, meanwhile nervously trimming his fingernails. Suddenly the cigar exploded, and Julian, crying "a blasted trick cigar," automatically raised his hands to protect his face. The knife was open in

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his right hand, and the blade cut an artery in his left wrist. Blood spurted. Julian cursed, asked the men to call his physician, Dr. Karless, and get him to the Philistine Hospital. Gilman improvised a tourniquet with his handkerchief and the knife, while Runyon notified the physician and the hospital. Julian had fainted, but between them the others got him to the street, flagged a taxi, and deposited him in the Philistine Emergency Ward a few minutes before the doctor's arrival. Recovery, they said, must have been rapid, since Julian was back at his office the third day.

Doc Kay questioned all four men as to the details of the discovery of Hendrix's body and subsequent findings. The four, together with Julian, had gone to the Hendrix suite at the appointed time, and, in the presence of the guard, opened the doors. The seals were intact, and it was obvious that they had not been disturbed. The body of John Hendrix, clothed in pajamas, lay across the bed. He had apparently been dead for some time. The Police Department was immediately notified, and the six men present, including the guard, had all testified that nothing in the suite had been touched since their entry.

The usual police routine followed. The body was photographed from several angles, cursorily viewed by the Medical Examiner, and removed to the morgue for autopsy. The four men stated, and the statements were corroborated by the authorities, that there were no indications of external violence. Exhaustive chemical tests failed to show any trace of poison in the viscera or circulatory system. In fact, no abnormalities were found except an extensive yellow atrophy of the liver, and a rather marked friability of the blood vessels, especially the smaller ones. Cause of death was certified as atrophy of liver, acute.

Doc meditated for a few moments. "Has Hendrix been buried yet?" Green replied that he thought the body was still in the morgue. Doc verified this by phone, and stood up. "If you fellows will come back in about three hours, I believe I can give you the answer."

Within half an hour, Doc was on his way to the morgue, where he had requested the Chief of the Homicide Squad to meet him. Only the chief's presence prevented Doc from being challenged, as he lugged a heavy case.

The corpse of John Hendrix was identified, and Doc and the Chief casually inspected it, while Doc fiddled with his case. Less than ten minutes had passed, when Doc signified his readiness to depart, and the Chief admonished the attendant that the body was not to be released for burial until further notice. Doc and the Chief separated after a few minutes' private conversation, and Doc returned to his office, to await his clients.

Needless to say, they presented themselves within the three-hour limit. Doc welcomed them with a triumphant grin. "I assume you fellows have no objection to Julian's indictment for murder, so long as

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you are not involved?" The agreement was unanimous and enthusiastic. Doc proceeded: "Runyon, you and Gilman will be asked to inconvenience yourselves to some extent, but it is necessary. Do either of you know Dr. Karless?" Both men admitted acquaintance with the doctor, and Doc Kay immediately called him.

"Dr. Karless," he said, "I have two friends here, Arthur Runyon and Tom Gilman, who are apparently developing a little trouble with their peripheral circulation. I believe they need Rutin but I have no access to the drug, which I understand is in very limited distribution. If I send them over, can you take care of them? Fine — an hour from now. By the way, should they require transfusion, they do not know their types, although Gilman tells me he and Mr. Julian were once donors to the same patient. That's fine — you'll only need to type Runyon. Thanks, Doctor. Goodbye."

Gilman was on his feet, his mouth open. "I was never a blood donor."

"For our purposes, you definitely were," replied Doc. After a short explanation, he sent Gilman and Runyon on their way to Dr. Karless.

Needless to say, the case of the State vs. Victor Julian attracted more public attention than a World Series. The courtroom was packed from the start, and every paper in the country featured the "Murder on a Bet."

Julian appeared confident as he was brought into the dock, and there was little delay in the selection of the jury. One prospective juror was excused as an employee of Julian's drug firm, and one peremptory challenge was used by the defense. To the question, "How do you plead?" Julian answered in a firm voice, "Not guilty!"

The State's Attorney rested his case with this statement.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, this defendant, Victor Julian, stands before you charged with the premeditated slaying of a man who had been his friend for years. Not only has the State proved the guilt of the accused beyond any reasonable doubt, we have also shown that in his pride and arrogance, Victor Julian deliberately advertised beforehand the fact that he intended to take human life and avoid the consequences. We have proved this by the testimony of four of the five reputable citizens in whose presence the threat was made — four, because the lips of the fifth are forever sealed.

"We have proved, by the introduction of documentary evidence, that the murderer expected to become enriched by this act, in the amount of $150,000.

"We have shown that the execution of the crime had been planned in all its details. We have introduced records from the Oak Ridge Laboratories proving that a shipment of a certain radioactive isotope with a brief half-life was ordered, received, and signed for by the defendant.

"One of the most eminent atomic

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experts in the world has explained to you that an isotope is a modification of an elementary atom which may be either naturally or artificially produced, with a chemical reaction identical to that of the usual form of the element but differing by the slight variation of two or three electrons; he has explained that these isotopes, as a rule, are radioactive and unstable — as, for example, the radioactive form of uranium, U-235, which differs by only three electrons from the ordinary stable uranium, U-238. We have shown you that many of these isotopes may readily be fatal to human life, and that their distribution is carefully controlled by the Atomic Energy Commission. We have proved that Julian's drug firm, and his firm alone in this city, had a supply of the medicinal agent known as Rutin.

"The accused's personal physician, Dr. Karless, has told you that Rutin was administered by him to the defendant, at his own request, on August 29, 30, and 31, and again, in the Philistine Hospital, on September 2 and 3.

"We have proved that the deceased and the defendant partook of whiskey furnished by the accused, in which a radioactive isotope, identical with that received by the accused from Oak Ridge, had been dissolved. We have shown, by expert testimony, that the amount of this activated whiskey taken by each man would ordinarily be sufficient to cause a fatal yellow atrophy of the liver within a few days, unless remedial measures were immediately taken.

"The execution of the plan required that the victim be placed beyond the reach of medical aid. We have demonstrated to you with what ingenuity this was contrived.

"The accused claims that the injury to his wrist and the resulting hemorrhage was accidental. In view of the chain of circumstances, can any of you believe that? This murderer had prepared his blood vessels by the administration of Rutin, an agent calculated to lessen the damage caused to the veins and arteries by radiation. He deliberately exsanguinated himself at about the time the radioactive isotope should have commenced to enter his blood stream, and underwent two blood transfusions within the next few hours, thereby removing most of the isotope from his body.

"Dr. Kay and Chief of the Homicide Squad Sullivan have testified as to the intense activity of a Geiger Counter, when brought near the body of John Hendrix, and this has been corroborated by two nationally-known physicists. Remember, ladies and gentlemen, the Geiger Counter is absolutely without prejudice.

"The defendant has disclaimed motive. I repeat that he had two, equally powerful: one, intellectual arrogance, impelling him to prove his contentions at any cost; the other, to gain possession of a large sum of money. . . ."

The jury returned a verdict of guilty, within an hour.

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# THIS WILL KILL YOU

*by Q. PATRICK*

HARRY LUND lay in the bathtub. Above him two pairs of his wife's nylons dangled wetly on the rail which supported the shabby gray-white shower curtain. He could hear Norma preparing Sunday breakfast in the kitchen downstairs.

After twenty-one years of marriage Norma's morning noises were so familiar to him that they brought exact visual pictures. He could see the inevitable cigarette dangling from her mouth while she squeezed oranges on the cluttered enamel table. Norma never dressed on Sunday mornings. He could see her thin body, draped in the old pink quilted robe, bustling about the kitchen.

Every day Harry Lund's aversion to his wife began a fresh attack on his nerves during those moments in the tub. He was a lazy man. He liked his comfort. He liked lolling in warm water, relaxing before the effort of a day at the drug store or, better still, relaxing with the knowledge of a long, indolent Sunday ahead. But he could hardly remember a time when he hadn't lain there in the steamy, cramped bathroom taut with hatred.

It was strange then to find himself on this particular Sunday morning lying in the same tub, hearing the same kitchen noises and yet completely free of hate. In fact, the sounds downstairs were almost exhilarating. Even the mental image of his wife's sharp, too-intelligent face with its critical black eyes and short graying hair brought no distaste.

This change of attitude was caused by the fact that he knew now that Norma would not be with him much longer.

He knew this because last night he had decided exactly how and when he was going to kill her.

The thought of murder, flirted with at first and finally embraced as a lover, had lived with him so long that now it had become an old friend. In consequence, he felt no awe at what he had planned to do. No guilt, either. He had let himself forget the shabby motives which had made him lay seige to the plain, enterprising girl who had graduated with him from Pharmacy School and to whom he had never been really attracted. He had forgotten how convenient it had seemed at the time to have for a wife a fully trained pharmacist. He had even forgotten the attractions of her little inheritance which, combined with his, had been sufficient to buy a drug store and launch his career. He had never admitted that it had been due to her drive and slogging hard work that this career had reached a modest success.

He only knew that he, the hand-

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some Harry Lund, was a figure of tragic suffering chained to a woman who had never appreciated him and whom he could never divorce.

Because he couldn't divorce her. Half the drug store was her property. Even if he could scrape up enough money to pay her off, she would never sell. He knew that. The store was Norma's whole life and she clung tenaciously to what she wanted.

Having endured so much then, he viewed murder, this final gesture of rebellion, as almost heroic, certainly as courageous and manly.

And the courage would never have come if it hadn't been for Frances. He realized that. It had been that chance, wonderful meeting with Frances on the bus which had released the true, virile Harry Lund from convention's slavery. Frances was young, dainty, submissive, everything that Norma wasn't. Frances was the type of girl that Harry Lund had deserved from life. And he was almost sure, if he played his cards right, he could get her.

A pleasurable tingle shivered his thickening body when he thought of Frances.

His plans were without flaw. He had gone over and over them in his mind, simplifying, perfecting, like an artist. From the beginning he had rejected drugs as too dangerous for a pharmacist. There were other ways.

"Harry!" Norma's voice, perpetually husky from a smoker's cough, rasped up the stairs.

"Coming, dear." He was surprised at the cordial, almost saccharine tone of his own voice. He must be careful about that. He lumbered to his feet, water streaming off him. More crossly, more convincingly, he added: "Hold your horses, can't you?"

As he dried himself, he studied his reflected body in the steam-stained mirror. Not bad for a man of forty-five. Bit of a paunch, maybe. But a gymnasium would soon fix that up. He concentrated on his face. Harry Lund had always been pleased with his face. Good teeth. Distinguished little mustache. Plenty of hair. Strong eyebrows over eyes that looked straight back at you.

Frances had remarked on his eyes only last week when he had snatched a few hours with her in a restaurant halfway between the city and the outlying suburb where she worked as librarian.

"It was your eyes I liked first. I noticed them right away when you picked up my books in the bus. They're so sincere."

A tiny chill of apprehension came. What would Frances think if she knew he was a married man? How fortunate that, on an adventurous whim, he had introduced himself under an assumed name. Frances was as trusting as she was innocent. She believed his story that he was a widowed salesman from upstate. She would go on believing him. After the thing was over, he could sell the house, the store. He could take Frances away, start a new life.

She need never know.

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"For Pete's sake," called Norma. "What are you doing up there? Admiring yourself in the mirror?"

"Coming," called Harry.

He smiled at his reflection so that he could see his firm white teeth.

Neatly dressed, he descended the stairs, thinking: *In a few hours how different everything will be.* The thought was so heady that he wanted to do something youthful, gay, whistle maybe or slide down the bannisters. He moved through the untidy little dining-room into the kitchen. Norma, in the old pink robe, was hunched over frying eggs that hissed on the range. She turned, the cigarette drooping from her mouth, giving him that look of keen appraisal which always made him feel transparent.

"My, isn't he beautiful this morning? How about being useful too and getting on to those dishes?"

Last night they had not washed the supper dishes. Usually Harry resented the unmanliness of having to work at a sink, but that sunny winter morning it almost pleased him for, as he started to rinse plates, he could look through the window and actually see the place where It Was Going To Happen.

The house was situated in a suburb, half developed before the war and still raw and unfinished, on top of a steep, barren hill. The house was completely his own. He had bought it with money surprisingly bequeathed by an obscure aunt. It was small, inconvenient, and he hated it. But real estate brought large prices these days. He would have no trouble in selling it for a profit.

As the dishes clattered, his study of the view outside was almost covetous. The snowfall of last week still clung to the landscape. It had frozen again during the night. He could just see the elbow of the sharp s-bend where the road swerved down the hillside to the city. Its surface was smooth with ice. An almost sheer drop slid away to the right. Suicide bend, they called it. Every Sunday afternoon Norma took the car into town to visit with her married sister. A skid on that curve would mean certain death. Especially if the brakes on the ancient sedan were not too good.

Harry Lund was sure that, this particular Sunday afternoon, the brakes would not be too good.

In his mind he saw himself in becoming black, palely acknowledging the sympathy of the neighbors. "It's terrible . . . like losing my right hand . . . I'm going to sell everything . . . start again somewhere else."

He began to hum under his breath as he piled wet dishes into the rack.

"Listen to him," commented Norma. "Humming. So handsome, so happy this morning. What's happened? Found yourself a beautiful girl friend?"

She laughed her hoarse laugh that was half a cough. There was sarcasm in the laugh, letting him know that she realized how improbable it was that any girl could be interested in a man of his age. An edge of the old hatred pushed up. Norma slammed a plate of fried eggs on the table.

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"Come and get it, Don Juan. I guess someone has to feed that body beautiful."

He left the sink and sat down obediently. She sat down opposite him, still smoking, stabbing at her eggs with a fork. She got up again for a house organ issued by some pharmaceutical firm and read while she ate. Norma studied all the new drug literature and, since she had written a couple of articles for *The Pestle and Mortar*, never tired of implying how little he did to keep up with modern medicine.

That was another reason . . .

Harry Lund's hand was trembling slightly as he lifted his coffee cup. It wasn't fear. It was excitement.

After they had cleaned up the kitchen, Norma settled in the living-room with her house organ. Under the pretense of chopping wood, Harry slipped out to the garage. He had a knack for tinkering with the car and enjoyed it. He kept an old pair of denim overalls in the garage. He put them on and wormed his way under the car's decrepit chassis. It took very little time to file the brake cable almost through. One violent application of the pedal would snap it. Almost certainly. And he knew Norma's driving as well as his own — and the road. There was no need for the brakes until the corner before Suicide Bend and there Norma always jammed them full on.

He took off his overalls, washed his hands in icy water from the faucet, picked up an armful of logs from the woodpile, and went back to the house.

Norma watched him from black, alert eyes over her magazine. "Domestic, too. All the virtues this morning."

He crossed to the fireplace and stooped to lay down the logs. Behind him Norma's voice came:

"The roads are terrible, aren't they? Think I should skip Ella?"

One of the logs clattered to the floor. He said with an evenness that made him proud of himself: "She'll be expecting you, won't she? You can't get in touch with her by phone. If you don't show up, she'll be afraid you've had an accident."

"I guess you're right." Norma laughed again, facetiously. "I might as well go anyway. It'll give you a chance to sneak in a date with your new girl friend. . . ."

Harry Lund stood at the kitchen window. Cautiously he had eased the car out of the garage for Norma and left it headed down the road. He had seen her, in her old blue tweed coat, step into the car and drive away. He had run back to the kitchen. Any second now the car would come into view from the window, approaching Suicide Bend. His stomach was fluttering. A curious sensation. Almost as if he was drunk.

The afternoon sunlight beat down on the empty twist of road. Suddenly a car gleamed, Norma's car. He saw it sweep into the bend, topple grotesquely for a second on the brink of

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the drop, and then plunge over. The sound of wrenched, rattling metal split the silence. A roar, a rumble, fainter as the car hurtled down, down.

He turned away from the window. He wanted to shout, to clap his hands, absurdly to call the boarding house where Frances lived and say: *Marry me, darling. Marry me.*

But he satisfied himself with a smile, the little curled sophisticated smile of an artist who knows that his job was well done.

He went into the living-room and turned on the radio loud so that it would seem reasonable he had not heard the crash. He picked up the house organ Norma had been reading. Soon the neighbors would be coming. He would be ready for them.

The front door buzzer rang shrilly. Harry Lund straightened his handsome red and blue tie and went to answer the door. Mrs. Grant, who lived down the street, stood on the threshold. She was panting.

"Mr. Lund, your wife . . . something happened to the car. It went over Suicide Bend."

Harry Lund put up a hand to cover his fine eyes. "God, no. It's not possible. I thought I heard something, but the radio. . . ."

"All the way down," panted Mrs. Grant. "I saw it. Right from the living-room window. Come."

He was running after her through the snowy streets. At Suicide Bend a little group of neighbors was huddled at the roadside. Moaning his wife's name, Harry Lund pushed through them and looked down. Far below in the bed of the valley he saw the car in flames, a twisted wreck of metal. He also saw two men stooped over some blue, half-visible object a little way down the sharp sloping side of the hill. A third man was scrambling away from them up the grade. He came to Harry and pumped his hand.

"She must have opened the door and thrown herself free. She's unconscious, maybe hurt a little. But Doc Peterson's down there and he says she's all right, Mr. Lund. It's a miracle. A miracle. . . ."

It was a miracle. Norma had escaped with only a sprained ankle and a shock to her nervous system. The injury was not serious enough for hospital, but Dr. Peterson confined her to bed for some weeks.

There was no suspicion of a fixed accident. Harry was almost sure of that. At first the immense relief kept him from thinking of anything else. But gradually he began to realize that life had become infinitely worse. Norma was a difficult patient, demanding constant attention. Her sister Ella, with four children, could offer no assistance. Harry had to hire an expensive day nurse. Without his wife to spell him, he was obliged to stay all day at the drug store, snatching a sandwich lunch behind the counter. With his evenings enforcedly dedicated to Norma, there was no chance to see Frances.

He had called her once, feebly ascribing his elusiveness to a succession

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of business trips. For the first time, Frances' voice had been chilly.

And to make matters worse, he had lost the car and the amount of insurance was much too small to buy a new one, even if a new one had been available. Each morning he had to get up two hours earlier to cook Norma's breakfast before the nurse arrived, and then to trudge down the snow-slushy hill to take the trolley to the store.

But of all the resultant miseries, the new, inescapable intimacy with Norma was the most gruelling. The little house had only one bedroom. Constantly smoking, propped up in bed in the pink quilted robe, his wife bossed him, questioning, directing store policy, like a tart-tongued old empress. Something, maybe a half-realized sense of guilt, maybe a tacit admission of her greater strength of character, made him obey meekly. She developed a perverse habit of waking in the early dawn hours and sending him, sleep-stupefied, aching with cold and hatred, to the kitchen for orange juice or a glass of hot milk.

Christmas came and in a burst of seasonal sentimentality, Norma insisted upon a tree in the bedroom. Harry had to drag it all the way up the icy hill and decorate it with colored balls and pretty little old-fashioned candles under a barrage of sarcastic criticism. The nurse demanded Christmas off. Harry Lund closed the drug store, cooked a turkey with the reluctant, neighborly help of Mrs. Grant, and served a meal, with gift-wrapped presents, to Norma in the bedroom. Norma was vivacious and, after domestic champagne, almost flirtatious.

That night Harry Lund knew that, however dangerous it might be, he was going to try to kill her again.

A trivial incident gave him his second idea. Norma was still in bed a few days after Christmas, but she could hobble around with the help of a cane. When she was in the bathroom, Harry came up from the kitchen to find that one of her inevitable cigarettes had rolled, still alight, from the ashtray and was smoldering perilously close to the low, tinder-dry branches of the tree.

Instinctively he stubbed it. But, as he did so, the idea sprang full-born into his mind.

The Retail Druggist's Convention was giving a banquet in two days' time. Norma knew about it and, always conscientious where anything professional was at stake, expected him to go. What if Norma, under the influence of a sedative, should drop asleep and leave a cigarette alight? What if a fire, a sudden, concentrated blaze in the bedroom, should break out while he was at the banquet? The house was insured. He had planned to sell it anyway.

Some sort of time-clock device was all he needed. His tinkerer's mind solved that problem easily. He brought home a couple of cans of lighter fluid from the drug store. All he had to do was to stand one of the

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Christmas candles under the tree on some of the artificial moss saturated with lighter fluid. The candle would burn down and ignite the moss. The moss would ignite the tree.

Harry Lund felt his manhood returning. That night he smiled at his reflection in the mirror.

It smiled back, reassuringly handsome and decisive.

Half an hour before he was due to leave for the banquet, Harry Lund, spruce in a freshly pressed blue suit, heated milk in the kitchen and dissolved into the glass three strong hypnotic tablets. He carried the glass up to the bedroom.

"Thought you might like your milk before I left."

"Why, how considerate he is." Norma's sharp black eyes studied him with mock admiration. "And doesn't he look dashing tonight!"

She tossed her cigarette down on an ashtray and drank great draughts of the milk. He kept himself from watching her. He moved around the room pretending to tidy up.

"Want the window open, dear?"

"On a night like this? You might help me to the bathroom though."

When she came out of the bathroom a few minutes later, she was already staggering from sleep. She mumbled confusedly as he half-carried her back to the bed and tucked her in. Soon she turned over on her side and began to breathe deeply.

Carefully Harry Lund arranged his death-trap under the tree, the candle, just the right amount of artificial moss soaked in lighter fluid, at just the right position under a dry limb.

He lit the candle. Half an hour, maybe. Or more. An hour. The tree would flare up. The curtains would catch. In a matter of moments the room would be an inferno.

The little candle flame flickered as he tiptoed out of the room.

While he trudged down the hill to the trolley stop, Harry Lund thought of Frances' young face flushed with love and gratitude as she unwrapped a prettily packed package.

"So you didn't forget my Christmas present after all! Oh, *Spring Lilac*. My favorite perfume. You shouldn't have done it. *So* expensive. . . ."

The telephone call came just after the banquet had begun. That morning he had casually mentioned the banquet to Mr. Grant so that the neighbors would know where to find him. It was Grant himself, announcing excitedly:

"Come back at once, Lund! Your house is on fire!"

Feeling important from the drama around him, Harry Lund made breathless excuses and raced for a taxi. As it slithered up the icy hill, he saw fire engines and a milling crowd outside his house. He also saw that, though the flames seemed to be almost extinguished, the upper floor had been completely gutted.

Warm with dangerous excitement, he got out of the taxi. Someone

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grabbed his arm and started to pull him across the lawn to the next door neighbor's house. He found himself in a brightly lit living-room. Norma was lying on a couch.

Someone was saying: "The smoke woke her up. She managed to crawl out just in time."

Norma's black eyes were fixed on his face, solemn with contrition.

"Harry, I'm so terribly ashamed. My vile habit of smoking in bed. I fell asleep and the cigarette must have set fire to the tree. . . .

The top floor of the house had been demolished, but downstairs there had been little or no damage. The agent from the insurance company did not question the legitimacy of the fire but let Harry know that the condition of the building warranted payment of less than a third of the total policy. With the increased cost of materials and labor, it would take almost all Harry's savings to make his home habitable again.

Owing to the housing shortage, it was impossible to find another place to live. For a short, dismal period, Harry and Norma led a squalorous camping existence on the lower floor of the burnt-out house. Then, by a stroke of luck, their tenants above the drug store moved to another city and they were able to settle in the tiny two room apartment there.

Norma could still walk only with difficulty and Doctor Peterson warned that the added shock of the fire should be neutralized by a long rest. But, taking on herself the full blame for the loss of their home, Norma refused to go away or stay in bed. As if in atonement she worked absurd hours in the store, hobbling around with a cane. A few weeks later she collapsed. Doctor Peterson diagnosed a heart condition, prescribed epinephrine, and put her back to bed.

For Harry Lund life had become gray and sour as the ashes of his destroyed bedroom. Twice, when Norma's sister Ella dropped in, he was able to slip away and call Frances, but his excuses were even less convincing and her acceptance of them even more frigid. This was very different from his rosy dreams of *Spring Lilac* and the girl's flushed gratitude.

Vain though he was of his attraction to women, Harry Lund realized that, unless something happened soon, he would lose Frances forever.

As disaster closed in from all sides, Harry Lund's picture of himself as a martyr took on an immense vividness. Life was pummeling him with blows whose strength was out of all proportion to his desserts. And, in consequence, his determination to finish what he had started grew out of all proportion also. No scheme was too reckless for him to consider. Once, at the poison safe in the store, he made up a capsule of potassium cyanide. Only the weak vestiges of a self-preservation instinct kept him from spilling it that night into Norma's bouillon.

But he kept the capsule always in his pocket. He would touch it fre-

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quently during the day. It became the one thing that was on his side.

And then the opportunity came. Harry Lund knew that only a man capable of daring and swift decision would have seen it as such. But then he was possessed of both qualities. One evening Norma had asked him to go around to her sister's to borrow a book she wanted. Just before he was about to leave, she had an attack.

Epinephrine! As he looked down at his wife, convulsively gasping for breath in the bed, the name of the drug prescribed by Doctor Peterson seemed to quiver between him and Norma in great red letters. Norma kept ampoules of epinephrine and a hypodermic always by her bedside. Proud of her knowledgeability, she had told Doctor Peterson that, if she felt a new attack coming on, she would administer the injection herself. A double dose of epinephrine would certainly kill even Norma.

Who could be suspicious if his wife, alone in the room, had tried to counter an attack and had inadvertently overdosed herself? This was using drugs, but it was using them with a difference — creatively.

His fine eyes bright with self-approval, Harry Lund filled the hypodermic from two ampoules. Norma was in a half-coma. She seemed barely conscious of what was happening as he administered the injection.

Scrupulously Harry Lund wiped his fingerprints from the two empty ampoules and from the syringe. Holding the ampoules in his handkerchief, he brought them in contact with the limp fingertips of Norma's left hand and then let them fall to the floor. With the handkerchief too he squeezed the syringe into Norma's right hand and left it where it dropped.

Get out quickly. That was all he had to do, just in case there might be some question about the time of death. Hurry over to Ella's house for a chat about the book Norma wanted.

When he shut the bedroom door, he seemed to be shutting a door forever on his misunderstood past.

Harry had a pleasant talk with Ella, extended through a cup of coffee and a piece of homemade cake. He knew Norma's sister had never liked him, but that day he was so charming that he could see her visibly thaw.

With the book under his arm, he started back to the drugstore. He had given the epinephrine plenty of time. During the next few days, he would need to do some clever acting, but Harry Lund was not worried. His exhibition with Ella had been flawless. He had always known that, if he had wanted to, he could have made a great success on the stage.

Already, as he climbed the drab stairs to the apartment, he had instinctively arranged his face for its necessary expression — the expression of a husband overwhelmed by the discovery of his wife's lifeless body. He was so preoccupied rehearsing the phrases he would use over the phone to Doctor Peterson that he had opened the door and stepped into the

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bedroom before he was conscious of anything unusual.

Then, as he looked across at the bed, all traces of reality seemed to be sucked out of the world. Because Frances was there. He saw her standing, young, silent, very stiff, at the foot of the bed. She was watching Norma who lay prostrate under the huddled bedclothes.

As he entered, Frances turned and looked at him. The look was one of unspeakable horror and disgust. He shook himself, staring stupidly. This was in his mind, some vile, cruel trick played by a treacherous imagination.

"Welcome home." Norma's voice sounded from the bed, cracked and weak but with a ghost of its sarcasm. "Your girl friend just arrived. You poor fool, Harry Lund. Thought I didn't know about her, didn't you? I've known for weeks. A friend of Ella's saw you together in a restaurant. It was easy enough to find out her name, where she lived."

The words fell on him like hammer blows. But it was the horror of Norma's being alive which completed his demoralization. He had pumped enough epinephrine into her to kill anybody. Could nothing kill her? His knees were like water. He tried to grope for some pattern — anything to remove this feeling of helplessness.

Norma's black eyes were watching him sardonically. "I telephoned this poor girl because I thought I should explain. She's not to blame, of course. Used an assumed name, didn't you? Told her you were a widower." A dreadful travesty of the hoarse laugh came. "Guess you thought you were — almost."

She shifted her gaze to the white, rigid Frances. "Three times he tried. First he fixed the brakes of the car. Then he set fire to the house. And now — the epinephrine. He put in a lot of work to get you. You should be flattered."

Harry Lund swung to Frances. Without any control, words spilled out. "Frances, listen to me. Please listen. It isn't true. I didn't. . . ."

The icy contempt in her eyes checked him. There was a moment of silence, as awful to Harry Lund as a bomb explosion. Frances turned and walked to the telephone.

Her voice seemed to surge up through the silence. "The police. Get me the police." And then: "Come quickly. There's been an attempted murder at. . . ."

Despair brought Harry Lund absolute clarity. He saw, in all its truth, how pitifully bungled had been his great design. He had lost his car, his house, and now he had lost his girl. The police inevitably would trace the damning connection between the three "accidents". Norma was there as living testimony against him and, with tormenting irony, Frances would be her witness.

His predicament was without remedy. Somehow, its enormity destroyed in him the worm of fear. His plan had been a magnificent failure. Perhaps that was what his destiny had always been. A magnificent failure. Hadn't

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all the outstanding figures of tragedy been overwhelmed in the closing scene?

The actor in him rose to its greatest moment. Frances would see him, at least once, as he really was. He felt exalted, high above the pettiness of Harry Lund, druggist. His hand moved to his pocket and closed around the cyanide capsule.

He walked nonchalantly to the bathroom, entered it, and locked the door.

Norma Lund bustled cheerfully around the drug store which was now entirely her own. Although she had been bored with her husband for years, some vestige of pity for him still remained. But Norma was a sensible woman with little sympathy for a fool. And that had been Harry's trouble. He had always been a fool.

True, she'd had her own moments of folly. She had only realized that her husband had fixed the brakes a few seconds before the car had toppled over the ravine. Her foolishness had almost cost her her life then. But, once she knew he had tried to kill her and would almost certainly try again, she had made no mistake.

She had rather enjoyed lying in bed, bullying him and keeping him from seeing that girl. It served him right. Later, when she had tasted the sleeping draught in the hot milk, it had been simple to take amphetamine as an antidote in the bathroom. While she pretended sleep, she had watched and almost admired Harry's device of the candle and the saturated moss. She had felt a certain pleasure in seeing his house burn too.

Perhaps she should have gone to the police then. It had been a risk, she supposed, to carry the farce on longer. But, because Harry was a fool, it had not been a dangerous one. The first sham heart attack, artificially induced by digitalis, had fooled even Doctor Peterson. The second attack, which had been sheer acting coupled with the planted props of the hypodermic and the epinephrine ampoules filled with sterile water, had seemed to her too obvious a trap even for Harry. But he had lumbered into it like an ox and provided enough evidence to convict him a dozen times over.

Mrs. Grant came into the store for a toothbrush and a bottle of mouthwash. She greeted Norma warmly. Since Harry's suicide, everyone had been particularly kind.

While she reached for the mouthwash, Norma was wondering whether Harry would have killed himself if Frances had not been present during those final moments of his humiliation. Perhaps, by introducing Frances, she had in a way turned from murderee to murderer.

But it was foolish to speculate. Things had gone well for her.

Mrs. Grant was saying: "It's really wonderful the way you manage to run this place all by yourself."

"I do my best." Norma Lund briskly wrapped up the mouthwash. "But sometimes it's hard for a woman all on her own. . . ."

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## *WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE: A. H. Z. CARR*

*Where do detective-story writers get their basic plot ideas? From the cloth of real life or from threads pulled out of the spinning wheel of imagination? These are the popular, the proverbial questions . . . And how long does the germ of the idea, whether derived from fact or fancy, lie dormant in the writer's brain? And what other ideas, relevant and irrelevant, attach themselves, barnacle-like, to the original conception — to grow, develop, and mature? Surely the writer's subconscious is the true melting-pot — of reading, overhearing, experiencing, wondering, talking, probing, experimenting — all the "ings" of life, rather than the "isms" . . .*

*The answers to some of these riddles, as they apply to the birth of A. H. Z. Carr's "The Trial of John Nobody," are, "although puzzling questions, not beyond* all *conjecture." But first, read one of the three finest stories submitted in last year's contest . . .*

# THE TRIAL OF JOHN NOBODY

*by A. H. Z. CARR*

THE train was late, and the conductor harassed. When, on a hasty passage through the coaches, he was stopped by a clergyman who had already questioned him twice, he suppressed his annoyance only out of deference to the collar. Yes, he admitted coldly, they had lost more time. They would not reach Wicheka much before three o'clock. The acute concern manifested by the clergyman at this news caused the conductor to look at him attentively. Suddenly he found something familiar in the tall figure, the baldish, gray-fringed head, and the bony, lined, worried face. His eyes widened, and he said:

"Say, you're Dr. Millard, aren't you?"

The clergyman glanced quickly around him with a touch of apprehension, and winced as he saw eyes turn toward him from seats within hearing distance. "Yes," he murmured. Instantly a chain of whispers was audible in the car: "Dr. Millard." "Where?" "Over there, talking with the conductor." "Dr. Millard." "Over there."

"Well, well," said the conductor, mingling respect with satisfaction, "I'd like to shake your hand, Reverend."

"Why — certainly," the clergyman replied, extending a thin reluctant hand to the other's eager grasp.

The conductor was no longer in a hurry. "Right from the first I felt about this thing the way you do. I told my wife, 'You mark my words,



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this is a real miracle.' The way I look at it, this John Nobody is kind of a Joan of Arc. Those voices. We've been going to church a lot more regular since this happened, Reverend. And we've got you to thank for it."

Dr. Millard said slowly, "I — I'm glad."

"Say," the conductor exclaimed, as if struck by understanding. "The trial! That's why you're so — I get it. I'm sure sorry we're late, Reverend. But you'll make it all right. You don't have a thing to worry about. There's no jury in this country would find John Nobody guilty. When he killed Durgeon, he was performing the service of God!"

With an air of challenge the conductor looked around the car, and relaxed when he saw nothing but approval in the faces of the listening passengers. "Well, good luck, Reverend," he said, and pursued his way up the aisle.

At once a throng gathered around Dr. Millard; a little girl who wanted an autograph, a sailor who wanted to shake his hand, an old woman, content only to touch his hand, a man who wanted to ask questions, and others, many others; until in desperation he arose and, with apologies, made his way through the admiring crowd to the platform of the car. There for the rest of the journey he stood breathing deeply of the cold air, and looking out at the gray, wintry landscape.

When the train reached Wicheka, Dr. Millard hastily secured his suitcase and joined the crowd jostling for taxi-cabs outside the station. A taxi-driver recognized him, and indifferent to competitive claims, proudly ushered Dr. Millard into his car and drove away.

"Thank you," said Dr. Millard. "I did not like to take advantage, but this is something of an emergency. Will you drive to the Municipal Courthouse, please?"

"Yes, sir," the driver answered, putting on speed. "I bet you're anxious to get there."

"Yes, I am."

"They've had a lot of stuff on the air about it all day. Every hour. I've been listening. Looks like it will be a short trial."

Absorbed in his own thoughts, Dr. Millard did not reply. After a moment the driver switched on his radio and picked up a news broadcast. Presently the sound of his own name cut through Dr. Millard's reflections and captured his attention.

"— Dr. Millard's absence continues to puzzle everyone present. In all other respects, however, the trial has followed expectations. In his brief opening address, District Attorney Parnall did not at any time refer to the conviction held by many people that John Nobody was divinely inspired when he killed Elmo Durgeon. Mr. Parnall stuck entirely to the legal facts. He reminded the jury of seven men and five women that John Nobody is the confessed killer of Durgeon. Psy-

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chiatrists who have examined him agree that Nobody is perfectly sane. Although he claims to have lost his memory prior to the slaying, he shows none of the usual signs of amnesia. I want to read you a passage from Mr. Parnall's address — and now I am quoting Mr. Parnall: 'The defense does not contend that the man who calls himself John Nobody is of unsound mind. And so far as anyone has been able to establish, he never heard of Durgeon, or had any contact with him. How, then, does the defense dare to enter a plea of justifiable homicide? What justification can there be for killing a man you have not even heard of? In the eyes of the law Durgeon's death is murder — wanton murder.

" 'John Nobody says that voices told him to kill Durgeon. Now the law is tolerant, but if we once started to let people get away with crimes just because they say they heard voices, there would soon be anarchy in this country. John Nobody may sincerely think he heard voices, or he may not, but those voices cannot be evidence in his defense.' End of quote.

"That is the essence of District Attorney Parnall's case. He did not try to suggest a motive for the killing. He is staking his case on legal logic. Whether that will satisfy the jury remains to be seen. At the end of his address he demanded that John Nobody pay for the slaying of Elmo Durgeon with his life — the full penalty of the law. The few witnesses whom he called merely confirmed the details of the killing which everyone now knows. Then Mr. Parnall rested the prosecution's case."

"Pretty smart, hey?" said the taxi-driver, grinning over his shoulder. "The D. A. hasn't got a chance and he knows it. He isn't even trying hard, for fear he'll get everybody sore at him."

"— counsel for the defense," the radio continued. "Most of us who were in the press section of the courtroom felt that the jury were far more responsive to Mr. Levatt than they had been to Mr. Parnall. When I left the courtroom to make this broadcast, Mr. Levatt had not yet finished his opening address. He began by referring to his anxiety over the absence of Dr. Millard, his chief witness. He even hinted that the prosecution may have contrived to keep Dr. Millard away from the trial. This brought an indignant objection from Mr. Parnall. After the courtroom quieted down, Mr. Levatt began his impassioned speech to the jury.

"He asked if the prosecution dared deny that Joan of Arc had heard voices. He quoted the Bible, and cited the records of prophets, saints, and holy men throughout the ages who heard voices from above. Then he went on to tell the story of John Nobody as the world has now learned it — a man whom no one ever remembers having seen before — a man who seems to remember nothing of his past, not even his real name

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or his place of origin — a man whose clothing at the time of arrest bore no marks of identification and who says he does not know how or when the rifle which shot Durgeon came into his hands.

"Mr. Levatt was extremely effective on the subject of the rifle. He said — and I quote — 'The prosecution has placed this rifle in evidence. Look at it closely, I beg you, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, for there is something strange and awesome in that instrument of death. What mysterious hand held it before it came to John Nobody? What fiery fingers erased from its metal and wood every numeral and mark that might have identified the rifle? You may say, if you are a materialistic cynic — as I know you are not — that John Nobody did it. But is it likely that John Nobody walked out of nowhere, without any other possession than a rifle from which he had deliberately eliminated every mark, just so as to prepare it to kill a man he had never met, and never heard of? Oh, ladies and gentlemen, this is a very strange theory that the prosecution has advanced. For my own part —' and I am still quoting Mr. Levatt — 'I do not claim to know how that rifle came into the possession of John Nobody, or how the marks were removed from it. But this much I say — if John Nobody, in his previous incarnation, whoever he was, whatever his name was — if John Nobody did remove the marks from that rifle, then the forces which prompted him to do it were the same mysterious forces which directed him to the balcony of the Civic Auditorium on November 14th — which helped him to aim the rifle unerringly at its despicable target — and which helped him to pull the trigger.' End of quote.

"This speech of Mr. Levatt's undoubtedly made a great impression on the jury. Remember that Mr. Levatt had questioned all the jurymen before the trial to make sure that they were people of strong religious beliefs. The defense attorney also made a sensation when he claimed that only heavenly inspiration could account for John Nobody's action, since he had no other possible motive and is not insane. Now my time is up, and I shall return to the courtroom. At four o'clock, I will be back with further reports on this trial of John Nobody, which has already become one of the most widely discussed cases in America's legal history. Now I return you to —"

The driver switched off the radio, and was about to speak, when in his rear-view mirror he caught a glimpse of Dr. Millard's eyes. Sensing the dark and inward nature of the minister's thoughts, he swallowed his words and drove in silence until they reached the courthouse. As he took his fare, he could not resist saying, "Thanks, doctor. I want to tell you, you've done a great thing for this town. Business has been booming ever since this —"

With a little gesture of protest Dr.

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Millard picked up his worn suitcase and hastened up the steps of the Municipal Courthouse. His entry into the courtroom made an enormous stir. Reporters left their seats and rushed for telephones in the corridor. A photographer took a flashlight picture of him, and was reprimanded by the court. Uniformed guards deferentially relieved him of his suitcase, and escorted him to the front of the court.

Mr. Levatt, the short, stout chief counsel for the defense, was about to question a witness then on the stand; but on seeing Dr. Millard he uttered an exclamation of satisfaction and rushed to him.

"As timely as an angel!" he exclaimed, and added in a low voice, "Where have you been? You've had us practically crazy."

"I must talk to you," said Dr. Millard.

"No time now," Mr. Levatt answered, dropping his voice still further. "We've got to get your testimony in this afternoon. Just look at that jury. We can fix their minds today so that nothing Parnall or the Judge can say will ever change them. You're all we need." Without waiting for a reply, he turned confidently to the judge, a burly, impassive man, and declared, "Your Honor, Dr. Millard's providential arrival makes it possible for me to save the court's time. With your permission I shall dismiss the present witness and ask Dr. Millard to take the stand."

The worry and indecision written on Dr. Millard's face did not escape the judge's eyes, but after a moment he nodded to Mr. Levatt, who took the minister's arm and with an air of veneration escorted him to the now vacant witness chair. The clerk of the court rattled off the oath, and Mr. Levatt, his voice gentle and respectful, disposed of the routine questions.

"Now, Dr. Millard, you were present in the Civic Auditorium on the afternoon of November 14, were you not?"

"Yes."

"Will you describe to the jury, please, in your own words, what took place in the auditorium that memorable afternoon?"

A profound stillness descended on the courtroom, and Dr. Millard lifted his eyes and looked around him for the first time. He saw Mr. Levatt's clever, eager face, the judge's attentive gaze, the district attorney's watchful interest, the rapt concentration of the jury; he saw the wide-eyed excitement of the spectators, including some members of his own congregation, from whom emanated almost palpable waves of encouragement and sympathy. Finally, his head turned to the small, silent man sitting in the prisoner's box. Their eyes met in a long glance which struck the observant as having in it something mysterious and secret, as if a message had passed between them. The man known as John Nobody looked away first, and his hand made a curious fumbling gesture below his

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thin, pale, but not unattractive face.

With an effort Dr. Millard brought his attention back to the waiting attorney. "The events of that afternoon." A flood of vivid recollection swept into his mind.

Except for the cultivated, ironic voice of the lone, lanky figure on the stage the auditorium was still with the concentrated silence of homage. Observing the fascinated eyes around him, Dr. Millard thought of a flock of birds, mesmerized by a serpent. And indeed — he carried the reflection further — the words of Elmo Durgeon were the words of the Serpent.

"People have accused me of encouraging sin. That is nonsense. They might as well accuse me of encouraging volcanoes. Like the volcano, sin is nature's way of letting off steam. It becomes dangerous only when it is bottled up too long. Let me tell you, sin is one of our most misunderstood institutions. It is not sin, but excess, whether of sin or anything else, that produces trouble for us. Real evil is more likely to flow out of attempts to be excessively virtuous, than from normal, moderate sinfulness. If I had to select a single piece of practical advice to give to young people today, it would be, 'Go forth, my son, and sin intelligently, in moderation.' Let me tell you a story —"

When Durgeon had first walked out on the stage and leaned over the little table with its inevitable carafe of water, the applause had been weak; most of the uplifted faces stern with disapproval. Nearly every woman in the afternoon audience — and it was composed mainly of women, with a scattering of reluctant husbands — had felt obliged to censure his notorious atheism, however delightedly they had read his prize-winning, best-selling novels, and however zestfully they had rushed to hear his famous, or infamous, lecture, *Defense of Sin.* Forty minutes of contact with his incandescent personality had rubbed away the masks of propriety. Ruefully, Dr. Millard considered that he never saw such captivated expressions at his sermons.

"— what it would be like to live in a sinless world? Can you imagine anything duller than a life of unbroken virtue? Sin is the essential pigment of life, providing the color of existence. What would we talk about without the sins of our friends and neighbors? What would we find to remember in our old age if it were not for the delightful sins of our youth? For each of us the secret story of his own heart is the best story of all, and what would it be without its scarlet passages?"

A murmur of half-shocked amusement swept the audience, and Dr. Millard shook his head. The theme, he told himself, was as old as Eden, but there was a vibrant force about the man himself that gave a certain plausibility to anything he said. It was not Durgeon's words that made him dangerous, so much as the personal magic that reached out from

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him to his audience, concealing the hollowness of his sophistries. Every churchman of experience knew that the only way sin could be kept "in moderation" was to fight it relentlessly. Given encouragement, such as Durgeon was giving, sin could swiftly expand, like an exploding gas, into disaster for the individual spirit and for society as a whole. Across Dr. Millard's mind flitted an ancient text: "An ungodly man diggeth up evil, and in his lips is a burning fire." Burning fire. Yes; Durgeon's words had a cool sound, but a searing quality, like dripping acid.

"My friends, what we call our sins are no more than the normal, emotional responses of healthy human beings to a difficult life. Consider lust, for example. Let's talk about lust for a moment. Let's talk about it sensibly, like the intelligent people we are — and of course you're intelligent, otherwise you would not be here. Let's not raise our hands in pious horror, but regard lust for what it is — proof that nature wants us to reproduce and continue the species more than it wants anything else from us. Why else are we constructed the way we are? My friends, the man who would have you cease to lust, at least while you are young, would destroy the essential humanity of you, would take away your emotional life and leave you sterile."

Dr. Millard regretted, now, his decision to attend the lecture. He had yielded to ladies of his congregation, who had pressed him to hear Durgeon in order to prepare a reply from the pulpit. It occurred to him now that by persuading him to go, they had provided themselves with an excuse. He could understand their curiosity. The publicity for the lecture had been relentless and effective. Durgeon's publishers and the bookstores of the city had advertised the author's books and his impending visit for weeks past. He was a fashionable subject at every woman's club and sewing circle. The newspapers had carried flamboyant accounts of his stormy lecture tour across the country, and only that morning a first-page story had been headed, *Famed Author Will Defy Heavenly Wrath.*

"Isn't it a joke, friends, that people should still crowd into church on Sundays, to hear sin denounced by some dear, good man who knows nothing about it? The only people qualified to give advice about sin are the sinners — like myself. When your clergyman talks to you about sin, if he really is a holy man, he can only give you second-hand opinions. If, however, he has led a sinful life, if he knows about sin from personal experience, then he has no right to be up there in the pulpit, scolding you. Why, I once knew a minister — a sweet old soul — whose children were juvenile delinquents practically from the cradle, but he never —"

Dr. Millard had an impulse to get up and leave, but he considered that to do so would make him unpleasantly conspicuous, and doubtless add grist

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to Durgeon's sardonic mill. He wondered how effective his reply to Durgeon next Sunday would be for the patently enthralled women in the audience? So far as charm and magnetism went, there could be no contest. He smiled wryly as he confessed to his heart that between a primrose path described by Durgeon, and a strait-and-narrow path described by Millard, the primroses would probably win, petals down.

"According to the dear, good men who talk to you on Sundays, I have been uttering blasphemies. On the basis of what I have said to you this afternoon, God — if there is a God — ought to have no hesitation at all about destroying me. It would be a great thing for religion if He were to send down a well-aimed thunderbolt about now, and put an end to me. Don't you think so? In fact, if He fails to hurl a bolt or two, I think it will be decided negligence on His part, don't you? Let's see if we can't persuade Him."

A quiver of anticipation made the audience seem for an instant to be physically responding to the satirical voice, as if this was the moment they had been waiting for. Dreamily, Dr. Millard thought, how wonderful it would be if a miracle did now occur — a flaming hand — a voice of thunder. He thrust the fantasy aside, as unworthy of his calling. The aware mind needed no spectacular proofs of God's existence. His attention returned to the stage. Cheap and hackneyed though Durgeon's performance was in its conception — and, after all, publicity-seeking atheists had been using the same trick for generations — yet the author managed to invest it with a certain dramatic suspense. With devastating mockery he was addressing the roof of the auditorium.

"All right, God, I invite You to destroy me. I urge You to do it. I ask You to send down Your lightning as proof that You really exist. I'm quite willing to be the sacrifice. Why permit a voice like mine to go on challenging Your existence? Here are all these good people, sitting here expectantly. Don't disappoint them, God. I'm putting my watch out here on the table. How long does it take to work up a good thunderbolt and hurl it? Five minutes ought to be plenty of time. Now, while the audience sits quietly waiting, God, give proof, if You can, that You are up there, listening."

There were a few boos from the audience, but they died away. Some of the faces which Dr. Millard could see wore frowns; others were amused, but all were entirely interested. Rumpling his hair and cocking one eyebrow in a deliberately Satanic twist, Durgeon began to pantomime his role — stifling a yawn, taking a drink of water, glancing at his watch.

"One minute has gone by, friends. God still has four minutes to make Himself heard. Don't give up hope."

He had barely finished the sentence, when the dull crack of a gunshot filled the auditorium. Shocked

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and staring, the audience saw Durgeon clutch his chest with an expression of surprise. A strange noise, resembling the word, "No," escaped him, and he slid slowly to the floor.

Through a sense of horror, as he looked at the trickle of red blood which appeared on Durgeon's white shirt, Dr. Millard became aware of a feeling of elation, as if suddenly his whole life had been vindicated. Instantly he was contrite at harboring so callous an emotion, but it was there, deep in him. A phrase from the Psalmist came unbidden to his lips: "Yea, He did swoop down upon the wings of the wind." In the same moment he realized that all around him elation and awe and guilt and terror were rampant in the breasts of people who had been challenging or encouraging Durgeon in their secret thoughts. Some were pale and silent, others cried out inarticulately. A man muttered, "God has spoken." Several women fainted, creating little eddies of movement in the mounting confusion. Bewildered voices asked what had happened, and other voices demanded, contrapuntally, "Who did it?" "Who shot him?"

Dr. Millard dismissed from his mind a feeble notion that Durgeon might be faking, to lend excitement to his act; there was a hideous and convincing realism about the limp posture of the body on the stage. Men rushed from the wings to where the author lay, and above the strident babble a voice roared from the balcony, "I've got him!" Another yelled, "Get his gun!" Muted shrieks rose from the audience, died away and rose again. As in a violent and oppressive dream Dr. Millard watched the efforts of the management to keep order, the arrival of a doctor on the stage, a subsequent invasion of police, ambulance interns, newspaper reporters, and photographers, and the removal of Durgeon's body. Presently a police officer announced that Durgeon was dead, that the man who had fired the shot had been apprehended in the balcony, and was giving no trouble; the audience would please leave quietly. On the way out Dr. Millard caught a glimpse of the prisoner being led quietly away by police — a small, ragged man, with sunken eyes in a heavily unshaven face of waxlike pallor, and a scarred and twisted jaw.

"Thank you, doctor," said Mr. Levatt. "I know that this excellent jury felt the essential truth in every word you have spoken."

The lawyer noted the tense whiteness of Dr. Millard's face, and the tight grip of his hands on the arms of the chair in which he was sitting. Automatically, he expressed his concern in a way calculated to win yet greater sympathy for his witness from the jury.

"You look tired, Doctor," he said in an audible murmur. "I know this must be a great strain for you. You're sure you feel well enough to go on?"

"Yes, I'm all right. Let's proceed," Dr. Millard replied.

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"Well, then, Doctor, after witnessing the remarkable scene you have described, you became interested in the arrested man?"

"Yes."

"I think it will save time if you describe for the court in your own way just how that happened, and just what your relation to John Nobody has been."

Again Dr. Millard glanced at the prisoner, who was watching him with almost breathless intensity; and he brought to his mind the circumstances under which they had first met, face to face . . .

It was a newspaper reporter who first called the nameless slayer "John Nobody," and the name had caught on. From the first, he was the darling of the press. All except two of the numerous psychiatrists who examined him refused to credit his protestations of lost memory; but it was the two exceptions whom the press preferred to quote, and the public to believe. The prevailing opinion was that the amnesia was genuine, but of "some unknown type."

Certainly John Nobody never wavered in denying knowledge of who he was, and where he came from. To all questions about his past, he replied with a slow, regretful, "I cannot remember." Photographs of his face and fingerprints circulated by the police and press all over the country brought no identification. People close to Durgeon — family, friends, publisher, agent, manager — were sure they had never seen John Nobody, sure that Durgeon had not known him.

As the only clergyman who had witnessed the slaying, Dr. Millard was promptly besieged by newsmen. Did he consider Durgeon's death an act of God? Was John Nobody an agent of divine wrath? Publicly he refused to make a statement; privately he wrestled with his own feelings. He had always preferred to keep his religious concepts on a high and rather abstract plane, and had never encouraged belief in the intervention of the Deity in personal affairs. He was not a credulous man, superstitious, or inclined to easy belief in miracles. But his vivid memory of his own emotions in the auditorium made him unwilling to regard the slaying of Durgeon as mere mundane murder. Besides, no motive had been found for murder.

Meanwhile, from the press, from other clergymen, from his congregation, from the public, increasing pressure came on him to speak out. Finally, the president of a Wicheka businessmen's club, conscious of economic aspects of the case which had never occurred to Dr. Millard, made an inspired suggestion: would the minister, esteemed by everyone in the city, head a public Committee of Investigation? Not without misgivings, Dr. Millard consented, and a committee of six was organized, consisting of reputable citizens with church affiliations, three of them women.

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On orders from the Mayor, the police permitted the Committee to have a private interview with the prisoner. John Nobody was brought into the room where the Committee awaited him, and having been given a chair, quietly submitted to their scrutiny and questions.

Studying him carefully, Dr. Millard saw a face of sharply formed, firm features, with small but intelligent brown eyes. The heavy scar which deformed the lower jaw gave an odd, stern twist to the mouth; but the face could not be called mean, or humorless. John Nobody, the minister estimated, was well over forty years old. His dark hair, heavily peppered with gray, was thin at temples and crown. Most noticeable was his complexion, of a dead pallor that could not be accounted for by his short stay in prison, and his breathing, which was somewhat labored. The man was obviously under a strain, but his manner was composed. His only pronounced sign of nervousness was an occasional curious gesture of his hand around the collar of his shirt — a fluttering of the fingers, which he repeated unconsciously from time to time in the hour that followed.

His slow speech was direct and grammatical, and his voice too suggested a better-than-average education. Dr. Millard found he could not give his accent a regional origin; it could have passed without notice almost anywhere in the United States.

Replying to the Committee's questions, John Nobody said, in deliberate sentences, and with a direct gaze, that he had tried hard to remember who he was, but that nothing came to him. Perhaps he sensed a certain good-will in the attitude of his inquisitors, for he spoke with more freedom and fluency than in his responses to the police. Particularly, he seemed drawn to Dr. Millard, at whom he looked continually when speaking, and to whom, some members of the committee felt, he was making an unspoken plea.

"The first thing I remember," John Nobody said, "was sitting on a stone fence, alongside a country road just outside Wicheka. I had on an old suit and an old overcoat that I never saw before, so far as I know. My head ached a lot. I was cold, particularly my feet, and for a little while I felt kind of sick. Then I noticed that I had this gun on my lap. A 30–30 repeating rifle it was. I knew that. I must have known something about guns. I pulled back the breech and saw that the gun was loaded. But I didn't have any idea how I got it. That was when I found I didn't know my name — or anything about myself."

"And then?" asked Dr. Millard.

"I sat there, for a while, trying to think. Then it seemed to me I heard someone speak, and I looked around. There wasn't anybody. It was kind of windy, and raw, and I couldn't see a soul any place. Then I heard somebody speak again. It wasn't exactly a voice. It was more a kind of a whis-

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per, a rustling sound. It said, 'You have been chosen. You have been chosen.' Over and over. I thought I was crazy. Then the wind blew a piece of newspaper along. It caught on a bush near me, and I reached over and got it.

"The first thing I saw was the name of this Durgeon. I couldn't remember ever having heard of him before, but somehow I knew right away that he was important to me. I read about how he was going to speak. Then I heard the voice again. And it said, 'A faithless generation looks for a sign.'"

The man called John Nobody paused, and sat frowning, his eyes obscure, like a man trying to understand something that puzzled him endlessly.

"Do you have any recollection at all of having attended church in the past?" a woman committee member asked gently.

He shook his head. "No, I can't remember anything like that." He took a deep breath, and resumed his narrative. "I was sitting on that fence, telling myself I was crazy, but I knew right then this wasn't my imagination. I just — knew. I knew I had to do this thing right away. I read the newspaper again, and put the sheet in my pocket. The police have it now. It told where this man Durgeon was speaking."

"Did you have any feeling about Durgeon? Did you hate him — or anything?" the woman inquired.

"Nothing like that. I didn't feel anything about Durgeon. But I knew what I had to do. There just wasn't any doubt about it in my mind. I started to walk along the road. It was a long way, but I never even knew it. All the time my head was kind of buzzing. I remember I carried the rifle under my overcoat, and it was awkward. Maybe you'll think I'm making this up, like the police did, but I knew in advance just where I was going and what was going to happen, and yet everything was new to me."

He paused again, and presently went on, in his slow pensive manner, "I didn't seem to hear the voice again until I reached the auditorium. Then the voice said, 'Enter and obey.' I heard it as plain as I can hear you, only it was kind of a whisper. I felt in my pocket and found I had money there — just about enough for a ticket in the balcony. So I got the ticket and went in. I just sat there listening. I didn't get mad or anything. I just listened. Then I heard the voice say, 'Now, my son.' So I stood up and went to the rear of the balcony, and knelt down and rested the rifle on the back of a seat, and I shot him. I don't remember having aimed or anything, but I suppose I did. I knew I would kill him with one shot. Then I just stood there, and the ushers came and grabbed me."

After questioning him at considerable length, the committee went away to confer. Dr. Millard was searching within himself for the essential conviction that he felt was

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needed, but the rest of the committee plunged without delay into argument. Two of its members — a woman and a man — were certain of John Nobody's sincerity and took the position that regardless of who he was or what his past, he had been in fact the agent of the Lord. One woman wondered if Nobody might not have been hypnotized, or might not have hypnotized himself. The third woman said she thought the prisoner crazy, but sincere. The only out-and-out skeptic was a physician, who said flatly, "He looks like a sick man, but he's not sick in mind. He's just a fake." Unable to agree, they finally appealed to Dr. Millard for his opinion.

With some hesitation he said, "I am unwilling to believe this is a fake. I am not able to judge what is a miracle and what is not, but what this man did certainly appeared to be the answer of the Lord to a blasphemer. At least we cannot say with assurance that John Nobody was not divinely inspired."

Starting from this qualified position, as the discussion went on, he found himself gradually becoming more definite in his stand. In the end he and the entire committee approved a public statement which concluded: "The Committee, with a single exception, agrees that the law should give every consideration to the fact that 'John Nobody' believed himself divinely inspired when he killed Elmo Durgeon, and may have been so inspired."

This statement made a profound impression not only in Wicheka, but in the nation as a whole. Newspapers, radio, newsreels, magazines — every agency of publicity blazoned it forth to the people. Overnight Dr. Millard, to his astonishment, found himself a national celebrity, hero of the devout, target of the skeptical. Although he refused all offers of personal advantage — radio appearances, magazine articles, and the like — he could not avoid occasional statements, which were over-simplified into such headlines as, *Divine Wrath Killed Blasphemer, Says Millard.*

His church became a magnet, not only for Wichekans of his own denomination, but for religious folk of all faiths and places, until he had to consent to deliver sermons to special meetings, as well as to his adoring congregation. A wave of religious sentiment in the country was attributed directly to his influence, and John Nobody's. Locally, it required a hardy spirit to challenge the committee's findings. The dissenting physician found his practice endangered by public resentment, and the District Attorney was embarrassed by the unpopularity of his prosecutor's role. He and the police were inclined to postpone court action until they could learn more about their prisoner, but public pressure forced them to set an early date for the trial.

A Committee of Defense was formed, and Dr. Millard was pressed into the chairmanship. Religious people everywhere contributed funds.

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Into Dr. Millard's home and into the jail poured envelopes containing checks and currency from all over the United States, and even from abroad. Enough money was received to enable the Committee to retain the most successful lawyer in the state, Hector Levatt, for the defense. Dr. Millard felt uplifted by the thought of the good people who were renewing their faith through John Nobody. And his own faith was strengthened and enlarged by theirs.

Not only the generality of God-fearing folk, but the businessmen and politicians of Wicheka threw their support to the defense. For one thing, the fame which the case was giving to their city and the large number of visitors arriving daily had a practical value that could not be ignored. The eyes of an awed and reverent world were on John Nobody and Dr. Millard; and the pocketbooks followed the eyes.

Concealing under a grave demeanor his sense of impending triumph, Mr. Levatt permitted a little pause to follow Dr. Millard's quiet and factual statement of his interest in the case. When the courtroom was still and expectant, the lawyer said, "Then, Dr. Millard, is it correct to say that your opinion about John Nobody is based on prolonged personal investigation of the facts?"

"That is correct."

"Now, Dr. Millard, am I correct in stating that having made this personal and unbiased investigation, with all the sincerity and humility for which the world admires you — having made this investigation, you came to the conclusion that the prisoner may, in fact, be considered as acting under a conviction of divine inspiration, and so in that sense, be the agent of divine anger, addressed to the destruction of a blasphemer, as a sign to an unregenerate world?"

Everyone in the court was aware that this was the real climax of the trial. It was a deliberately long and tortuous and leading question, designed to achieve a powerful effect. Mr. Levatt was taking advantage of the fact that the state could not challenge his examination of his revered witness without irritating the jury.

Dr. Millard did not reply at once, and the courtroom waited one second, two seconds, three seconds, until a wave of uneasiness began to rise among the spectators. Then, as if summoning up reserves of strength, the minister lifted his head, and looking directly at Mr. Levatt, said, "I did at one time hold such an opinion, but I no longer hold it."

Mr. Levatt fell back as if he had been struck a physical blow, and gaped at his witness incredulously. All over the courtroom amazement was visible and audible: on the faces of the staring prisoner, of the jury, even of the district attorney; and in a rising murmur from the spectators. The judge rapped sharply with his gavel, and Mr. Levatt attempted a chuckle. "Evidently," he said, "I

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failed to make my question clear. Did you understand the question, Doctor?" and he muttered under his breath, "Say *no!*"

But Dr. Millard said, "Yes, I understood your question. It is the deepest sorrow of my life that I must give you this answer. I do not now believe that the prisoner was divinely inspired."

Bedlam broke out in the courtroom as reporters dashed for the door, and unbelieving voices rose everywhere. The judge pounded for order without avail, while the prisoner was seen to sink back in his chair, breathing heavily, his face twisted in an expression of pain. District Attorney Parnall was on his feet, tense with new hope.

The defense lawyer looked coldly at Dr. Millard, and then said, "That is an astonishing statement to come from you, Doctor. I feel certain there is some misunderstanding which can easily be cleared up. In the meantime, if it please the court, since this witness's testimony will obviously take longer than expected, and the hour is late, I ask for an adjournment —"

The District Attorney objected strongly, and the judge refused the adjournment. Mr. Levatt, his face deeply flushed with anger, turned to his witness again, and rasped, "I must ask you, Dr. Millard, to tell the court and jury — and to tell me — what influences have been brought to bear to make you change your expressed convictions at the last minute."

"Objection!" shouted Mr. Parnall.

There was a brief legal clash, the question was re-worded to eliminate its ugly implications, and Dr. Millard answered in a strained voice, "I had my first doubts some days ago."

"Days ago! If you had doubts why didn't you mention them before?"

"I was not sure. I could not speak before I was sure."

"Of course." Mr. Levatt was heavily sarcastic. "You kept these so-called doubts to yourself, you waited until the last moment, so as to be sure of getting all the publicity —"

The prosecution objected, and argument followed. Dr. Millard did not hear it. His eyes had turned again, with infinite sadness, to the prisoner, and his thoughts to the first dreadful moment of suspicion.

He and Levatt and John Nobody had been in the warden's office at the jail, and had been examining mail addressed to the prisoner from all over the nation. Most of it, offers of money, prayer, or marriage, had been assorted and classified by the warden's staff; a few letters of unusual character were held apart. Running through these, Dr. Millard found an odd, brief missive that differed from all the others. Printed on plain cheap paper, in sprawling black letters, was the single word, *HELP!*

He studied the sheet curiously, and glanced at the envelope attached to it. The address was also printed: *John Nobody, Wicheka*, and the letter had been mailed in Cottersville, a town in the southern part of the

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state. Tossing it to John Nobody, he said, "This is odd."

John Nobody glanced up with a smile that he always had for Dr. Millard, a smile which seemed to suggest that they were linked by invisible bonds of mutual faith and understanding, to the exclusion of others. But as he glanced at the letter, Dr. Millard saw a sudden cloud pass over his face, and heard the stertorous breathing that always betokened emotion on the prisoner's part. Instantly he mastered himself, shrugged, commented, "Just a crank, I guess," and put the letter in a pile of others. Nothing more was said. But Dr. Millard had an unpleasant impression that the letter had given John Nobody a shock, and held some hidden significance for him.

The doubt, as it met the wall of his determined faith, ebbed away. Probably he had been wrong, he told himself. The prison doctor had said that John Nobody's health was bad; it was easy to misread the expression of a sick man's face. Thus repressed, the incident might have dropped out of Dr. Millard's memory had it not been for something that occurred a few days later, when he and Levatt were questioning John Nobody about certain details of his story. At the end of their talk the prisoner arose and stood, facing the door, his face partially turned from them, awaiting the guard who would take him back to his cell. Levatt chose this moment to remark to Dr. Millard in a low voice, "I don't think we'll have to put him on the stand. Looks to me like an open and shut proposition, just with your testimony."

Glancing at John Nobody, Dr. Millard saw that he was close enough to hear, and was startled at an expression of exultation on his profile. It was gone quickly, but it stayed in the minister's mind. He was certainly not disposed to judge any man by a fleeting change of countenance, and it seemed absurd to magnify anything so trivial by speaking of it. Nevertheless, the incongruity between the John Nobody he had glimpsed then and the John Nobody he had helped to present to the world was a challenge and a disturbance.

Something else had been working obscurely in his brain, during his weeks of reflection about the prisoner — John Nobody's curious mannerism in moments of strain — that movement of his fingers in the air, just at the level of his collar. It had struck Dr. Millard that the gesture was not unfamiliar, yet for the life of him he had been unable to identify it. Not until a night just before the opening of the trial did an explanation come to him. He was trying to fall asleep at the time, and the flash of realization brought him bolt upright.

The gesture was that which bearded men habitually make when they stroke their beards.

The implications of his discovery startled him. If John Nobody had worn a beard, that might account for the failure to identify the published photographs showing him clean-

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shaven; for the police had promptly shaved off the heavy stubble he had worn when arrested.

Dr. Millard told himself that he was assuming too much. He might be wrong about the beard; or even if he were right, it was possible that John Nobody had forgotten in his amnesia that he had once worn a beard, while retaining the mannerism. Nevertheless a terrible suspicion stayed with Dr. Millard. The prisoner's constrained response to the enigmatic letter; the sudden revelation of his eyes when he heard Levatt speak of certain victory; the possibility that a bearded man came beardless to Wicheka — all this suggested something untold and perhaps sinister in John Nobody's background.

Early the next morning he went to the jail and saw John Nobody alone. Sitting face to face with the prisoner, Dr. Millard said abruptly, "John, did you ever wear a beard?"

The hand started toward the chin, and stopped in mid-motion; the rhythm of the heavy breathing broke; but when John Nobody spoke he said calmly, "I don't think so, Doctor. I don't remember ever wearing a beard."

Dr. Millard reflected, and said, "John, I think you know I am your friend. I have believed in you. I want you to realize something. You are no longer just an individual. You are a symbol of hope and faith for millions of good and kind people all over the world. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, I do, Doctor."

"You would not betray all those people, would you? No matter what it cost you? You would not lie to me?"

The small brown eyes met Dr. Millard's gaze steadily. "No, sir. I wouldn't do that, Doctor."

"Tell me — do you remember that letter — the note that said, *HELP*?"

"Note?"

"Yes, it was in the mail, last Wednesday, I think. I showed it to you."

"Wednesday. No, I don't seem to remember it, Doctor."

When Dr. Millard left the jail, he found that he could not shake himself free from gnawing doubt. He tried to tell himself it was too late to do more than pray that the Lord's will be done. For even if John Nobody knew something more than he had told, would it not be better to let it remain hidden, rather than risk shaking the faith of the devout men and women who were giving the prisoner their spiritual and financial support? But the trouble worked ceaselessly in the minister's mind. Early the next morning, without explaining his purpose to anyone, he left the city on a southbound train.

Cottersville was a small and sullen town in a backward rural area. Dr. Millard promptly sought out a fellow minister, a young man named Kinter, to whom he said, "I should not like to have it known that I am here. My mission is rather curious and delicate, and I cannot as yet reveal much about it. May I ask you to take me

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on faith, and give me your cooperation?"

The younger minister, a little overwhelmed at the presence of the celebrated Dr. Millard in his house, freely offered his services.

"In brief," explained Dr. Millard, "I should like to know whether you can tell me of any bearded man in this vicinity who has not been seen for the past two months."

The Reverend Kinter looked at him with surprise, but staunchly repressed his curiosity. "No," he said reflectively, "I can't think of anyone like that. Beards aren't very common in these parts. But I'm not the best person to ask. The man who really knows everybody around here is Charlie Gifford, the Town Clerk. Would you like me to take you over to him?"

If Dr. Millard's question had surprised the Reverend Kinter, it had also sounded grotesque to the Doctor himself. He was glad of the negative answer, more than willing that his quest prove fruitless and that his suspicions be revealed as the products of a fatigued mind. Now that he was in Cottersville, the motive for his coming was no longer as clear to him as it had been. Surely the association of a postmark with a presumptive beard was a tenuous piece of reasoning. He sighed as he reflected that he was getting old and foolish. However, now that he had gone so far, he would do what he could to make peace with his own unworthy mind.

The Town Clerk, whom they found in his barren office, turned out to be an ancient, wrinkled, but keen, long-memoried and garrulous man. To the request made of him for information and secrecy, Mr. Gifford eagerly assented, after which Mr. Kinter somewhat reluctantly left them. When Gifford heard Dr. Millard's question, he looked up sharply, and at that shrewd glance all the minister's senses sprang to attention.

"Funny you should ask that," said Mr. Gifford. "Only a couple of days ago I was out Mills Point way. That's in this township, about seven miles from here. I had some other business there, so I thought I'd drop in and see these people named Cullen. They got a little house out there. Matter of taxes they haven't paid. Thought I'd better ask 'em about it before I had to sic the law on 'em."

He cocked his head humorously. "Maybe I was a little curious, too. They tell me I'm a gossip. About all I got to live for is what other people do, 'cause I can't do much myself." He chuckled heartily. "Well, these Cullens. I been wondering about 'em. They keep to themselves. Don't think I've seen Cullen more'n a couple of times since he's been here. Funny, hey? Don't come into town much except for shopping, and the wife does that. Drives in about once a week in their little jalopy. Or did until the grocer and butcher stopped giving her credit."

Scratching his head reflectively, he added, "Cullen's got a beard. Big and heavy. Hair all over his face."

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Dr. Millard said tensely, "Has he left Cottersville?"

"That's what I'm saying. When I called, there wasn't only Mrs. Cullen. I asked her where he was, and she said he was away — abrupt. 'Been away long?' I asked her, 'cause I hadn't heard about it, and she says to me, 'What do you want?' Hard, like that. She ain't a bad looking woman, so I figured maybe she thought I was getting fresh" — he cackled — "so I told her quick I was just calling about the taxes. She said her husband'd pay the taxes soon. I told her to remind him 'cause he was bad overdue."

A sense of impending revelation was in Dr. Millard's heart as he asked, "What does Cullen look like?"

"A little bigger'n me. Brownish hair and beard. Shaggy eyebrows. Don't remember the color of his eyes."

"Do you think you could recognize him without his beard?"

Mr. Gifford looked up quickly, a glint of comprehension in his eye. "Might."

Dr. Millard took a photograph of John Nobody from his pocket, and Mr. Gifford studied it attentively. "Plenty of these in the papers lately," he said. "Never noticed any resemblance before. Don't look much like Cullen. But now, wait. In a way it does, too. Never saw the scar, but that would be on account of the beard. Hair looks the same, and forehead. But the eyebrows are different, and the lashes look smaller." He hesitated. "Hold on, though. I remember Cullen had long lashes, the kind women like. Suppose he trimmed those, his eyes might look different. Same with the eyebrows. Then take away the beard, and yep, I wouldn't be surprised."

"You're not sure?"

"Well, not to swear to."

"Can you tell me anything about Cullen — the kind of man he is?"

"Maybe. I hear things about people. Best part of this job," said Mr. Gifford cheerfully. "Cullen. Let's see. They came down here about six months ago. I met him when he took title to that little place of theirs. Not country folk. He talked real glib. Said he was writing a book, but didn't say about what. Didn't strike me as a book writer. More like the kind you see at county fairs, selling stuff. Never got any mail, postman tells me. Couple of times I wondered if they wasn't hiding out."

"What did they do for a living?"

"Never could make out. Had a little bank account, but I hear it shrunk away to nothing back a while. Must have been living off capital. Fool thing to do. Cullen told people he'd had a heart attack and had to rest quiet. Looked like it, too. Neighbors tell me about all the exercise he took was when he'd go into the woods and shoot birds. With a rifle, too. That's dumb. But," Mr. Gifford added significantly, "I hear he can shoot real good."

Dr. Millard's face was haggard. "What sort of woman is Mrs. Cullen?" he asked slowly.

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"Looks to me like she might have been a chorus girl back a ways. Not bad looking, but hard. Maybe you'd like to talk to her, Reverend? I'll be glad to drive you out there."

Mr. Gifford's modest car took them over a bumpy road to an area of squalid farms and shabby houses outside the town. They turned in at a small, isolated, and unkempt dwelling, surrounded by a few acres of overgrown land. A big woman, in whom vestiges of blonde beauty showed through untidy hair and slatternly dress, came to the door. At the sight of Dr. Millard she stood suddenly still, her hand at her throat.

"Perhaps," Dr. Millard murmured apologetically to his companion, "it would be best for me to speak to her alone."

Mr. Gifford looked disappointed, but he said, "Sure. I'll wait."

Dr. Millard approached the motionless woman, in whose face surprise had given way to calculation. "Mrs. Cullen?" he said formally. "My name is Millard. May I talk to you alone?"

Silently she stood aside to let him enter.

Mr. Levatt, playing for time, and unwilling to relinquish his witness for cross-examination, was asking Dr. Millard questions designed to embarrass him, rather than to reveal information. In particular, he challenged the minister's memory of the exact words used by Mr. Gifford. Finally the judge intervened.

"If you care to make a statement using your own words, Dr. Millard, of the information Mrs. Cullen gave you, the court will hear you."

He waved away Mr. Levatt's irate protest, and turned his full attention to Dr. Millard.

A radio was chattering as they entered the dingy parlor, and Mrs. Cullen snapped it off. "Have a chair, Reverend," she said, and cleared a litter of magazines and newspapers from an armchair, ousting a gray cat, which minced out of the room with an indignant mew. Dr. Millard noticed that the woman's high voice was throaty and blurred, and simultaneously he caught a smell of liquor in the room. She followed his glance to an open whiskey bottle and partially filled glass on a table.

Shrugging, she said, "Like a drink, Reverend? No? Well, you won't mind if I finish mine."

"I shall come to the point, Mrs. Cullen," he said, handing her the photograph of John Nobody. "I have reason to believe that this man is your husband."

Her blue eyes stared at him stonily. "You've got it wrong, Reverend. My husband is away on a trip. I've seen this John Nobody's picture before, and he's nothing like my husband."

He frowned. "You have a choice between talking to me or to the police. If they add a beard and heavy eyebrows to the photograph, would you know him then?"

She licked her lips, pretended to look at the picture more closely, and

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muttered, "You didn't say anything about a beard. I'm not sure."

"His name, Mr. Gifford tells me, is Ambrose Cullen."

"That's my husband's name."

"Mrs. Cullen, you can't conceal the truth long, and you will be wise to speak it to me. Surely you know I have been a friend to your husband."

She glanced at him appraisingly. "You mean you're still on his side?"

"I am on the side of the truth," he said sternly.

She looked dissatisfied. "Suppose it is Amby," she said carefully, "and mind you, I'm not saying it is. But even if you can prove it's him, that doesn't mean he isn't divinely inspired."

He was genuinely startled. "But surely it is plain that the shaving off of his beard showed premeditation."

"The voices might have told him to do that too."

The last atoms of illusion vanished from his leaden heart. "Do you seriously expect anyone to believe that?"

"Why not? The jury will, anyway. Worst that could happen is that they'll disagree. They'll never convict him." She eyed Dr. Millard defiantly. "Besides, you can't prove anything."

"I can telephone to Wicheka and say that I have discovered new evidence," he said quietly. "Then, the police —"

"The police can't make a wife give testimony against her husband," she flashed out. "I know the law. Who you trying to kid? I thought you said you were his friend. You don't act like it." She tossed off the remainder of her drink, and raised the bottle, only to find it empty. "And that's the last one!" she said disgustedly. "What a life. Nothing to drink, only canned stuff to eat, nobody to talk to. I'll go nuts!" She seemed struck by an idea. "Say, Reverend, since you're so interested in Amby, how about lending me a little money? I'll pay it back when, well, soon."

"I'm sorry," he said uncertainly.

Her expression became cunning, her voice wheedling. "Now look," she said. "Maybe we can make a deal. You want to ask me questions. O.K. I'll answer them — at a price. Say a hundred — no, you preachers don't have much — fifty bucks."

"Do I understand," Dr. Millard said thoughtfully, "that you will give truthful answers for fifty dollars?"

"Why not?" She giggled. "What have I got to lose? My word is as good as yours. You couldn't prove a thing. Amby saw to that. He's smart, my Amby. This thing is fool-proof. Besides, after what you've been saying, Reverend, if you try to turn against him now, you'll only make yourself a laughing-stock. I can't figure you out, but you're not that much of a dope. How about the fifty?"

Dr. Millard made up his mind. Examining his thin wallet, he replied, "I haven't that much with me. I can spare twenty-five."

She pursed her lips. "Nothing doing." Suddenly her eyes widened

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and glistened, and she smiled at him. "I tell you what. You can give me a check for the other twenty-five."

"How can I be sure," he asked doubtfully, "that you will tell me the truth?"

"Don't you trust me?" She giggled. "Give me the check now. Then ask ahead. When I've answered, you'll know I've told you the truth, and you give me the other twenty-five in cash. O.K.?"

Dr. Millard nodded, and taking a blank check from his wallet, uncapped his fountain pen and wrote. She seized the check and scrutinized it eagerly. "All right, Reverend, shoot. Wait a minute, though, let me ask you something. What made you come here?"

"The letter you sent to the jail."

Her face darkened. "I was afraid of that. He told me not to. I shouldn't have done it." Anger melted her caution, and the words came out in a torrent. "What could I do? I was broke, and the dirty tightwads in town wouldn't let me have credit. And the taxes overdue. I wouldn't put it beyond that Gifford to toss me out on the road."

It seemed to Dr. Millard that she was asking absolution for having disobeyed her husband. She went on, "I couldn't think of anything else to do. He wanted me to stay here. The radio said a lot of people were sending him money at the jail, and I figured he might find a way to get a little of it to me. I didn't know how, but he's clever. I knew he'd guess what I meant. For a second when you came along I thought maybe he sent you. I still don't get how you found out. With all the mail he was getting, how could anybody figure anything out from just one word?"

She checked herself, and scowled. "Even if they can prove I sent it, that still wouldn't mean he knew anything about it. Listen, I'm talking pretty free to you. I don't know what your game is, but you better not try anything funny. See this check?" A contemptuous smile flickered on her mouth. "One squawk out of you, Reverend, and you know what I'll say? I'll say you came here, inquiring about Amby, and when you found I was alone, you started to get gay. I'll say you knew I was broke, so you offered me the check for my fair white body. Get it? Maybe not everybody will believe me, but plenty will, and you can bet the papers will like it. That would finish you, Mr. Minister. So keep your trap shut."

The genuine horror in his face made her laugh. The cat mewed loudly in the next room, and she called, "Here, pussy, pussy." It came running to her, sprang into her lap, and began to purr as she caressed it. Relaxing, she continued. "Now that we understand each other, Reverend, I'll earn that other twenty-five, because I don't want to part with this check. So ask your questions."

Grimly, he said, "Why did your husband kill Durgeon?"

"I don't think he intended to kill him. Just wound him, was the way he had it figured."

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"But why?"

"We were broke, that's all."

"But how could shooting Durgeon —"

"You are a dumb bunny, Reverend. But no dumber than the rest. Why, after the trial, they'll pay him a fortune for newspaper articles, and lectures, and maybe even movies. It can't miss, the way Amby figured it. We'll be rich. And nobody could ever prove that's why he did it. Don't you get it?"

There was a silence as Dr. Millard considered the enormity of her statement, and the more terrible enormity of her satisfaction. "Surely," he said at last, "he was taking a great risk."

"Not so great. Durgeon was a perfect set-up, with those lectures of his. People around here are suckers for a stunt like that. Amby said the worst thing that could happen was that they'd call him crazy and put him away for a while. And that wouldn't be any worse than living in this hole with his bad heart and asthma and nothing to do while we ate up our money. Most women wouldn't have stood for it." Tears of self-pity welled up in her eyes. "But I love the guy."

"But couldn't he have made money in some other way, without murder?"

At the word, her scowl returned. "There were reasons why he didn't want to — that's none of your business. Anyway, he had to take it easy. Durgeon deserved to be shot — everybody knows that. Blaspheming God the way he did. Amby'll be a kind of saint — you wait and see. Once this thing is over, he'll be rich and famous. We won't have to worry about the future, or the past either."

"Wasn't he afraid of being recognized?"

She sneered: "When he shaved off his beard, and I fixed his eyebrows and eyelashes, I didn't know him myself. He's worn different kinds of beards for twenty years, ever since he got that scar, and he never had his fingerprints taken. Nobody saw him going up to Wicheka, either. I drove him myself, at night. Nobody would have recognized him if you hadn't poked your nose in."

"When did he first plan to kill Durgeon?"

"Started when he read about Durgeon's lectures, and said what a joke it would be if he did drop dead while he was defying God. Then he started to think. He said he would be a public benefactor if he killed Durgeon. He's smart, my Amby. He planned it all out, like a movie — just what people would do, and what he would do. What he would say to the police. Even the tone of voice. I always tell him, he should have been an actor."

Her tongue and pride were thickening together. "He had everything figured out. How he wouldn't remember anything, but otherwise be perfectly normal. That way the doctors might say he was faking, but they couldn't call him crazy. He knew the public would be on his side and get him off. He's smart. Listen, Rev, when you see him, tell him I'm waiting, will you? Tell him

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I'm going nuts, but I'm waiting." With an irritable gesture she brushed the cat from her lap and rose to her feet, staggering a little.

Dr. Millard said, "May God forgive you."

"Oh, can that stuff!" she flared out. "And don't think you can walk off without leaving the twenty-five bucks."

As he handed her the money, she said with a touch of uneasiness, "So now you know all about it, and what good will it do you? You can't prove anything. If you talk, you'll only ruin yourself. And don't forget this." She waved the check in his face. "If you try to make trouble for Amby, your name will be mud. Dirty mud." She laughed at him. "Amby will be proud of me."

Numb in spirit, Dr. Millard heard her out, and went back to the car, where he was joined by Mr. Gifford. As they drove off, the Town Clerk glanced at Dr. Millard's unhappy profile, and said, "Don't look so worried, Reverend." He chuckled. "She might be able to say that one of us was a liar, but not both."

As his meaning sank in, Dr. Millard turned to him unbelievingly. "You heard her?"

"Well, sure. I wasn't going to miss out on a juicy thing like that. I would have died of curiosity, sitting in the car. So I just went around the house, and sneaked in the back door. Heard it all. Thought that blamed cat was going to give me away, once, but my luck held." Mr. Gifford laughed loudly. "She'll sure be surprised. Makes her a kind of accessory, I guess. My idea is this Cullen must have swindled somebody, and decided to hide out in a quiet place until things cooled off. Something like that, I bet. Well, Reverend, you can just catch Number Sixteen to Wicheka if we step on the gas. You'll have to stall 'em off at the trial until I get there. I guess this is going to be tough on you, no matter how it goes. But it'll be jam for me. Yep." He grinned in anticipation. "I'll have to pack a bag and tell the wife I'm going, and I'll be up on the next train."

Dr. Millard could sense the seething antagonism of the courtroom as he completed his statement. A feeling that they had been duped and cheated rankled in the minds of jury and spectators alike. Resentful eyes turned from the prisoner, his pallid face working endlessly, to the grim witness, and back again. A reporter in the press benches said audibly, "He's through." A harsh voice replied, "They're both through. Millard gave the people a miracle and now he's taking it away! They won't stand for that."

Mr. Levatt, with a shrug of resignation, relinquished Dr. Millard to the prosecution. The District Attorney said promptly, "Your Honor, I intend to move for an adjournment, pending the arrival of this new witness, Mr. Gifford. But first I should like to say this to you, Dr. Millard, that the state rejects the insinuations

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of the defense that you have been serving any personal end at any time in this case. If there is anything else you care to add, Doctor, I'm sure the court will be interested in hearing it."

"Thank you," replied Dr. Millard, constrainedly. His face looked old and tired. "I must confess that when I came into the courtroom I hoped that there might be some way of avoiding this shock to all the people who sincerely believed, as I believed, in John Nobody. But it was too late. And perhaps it is for the best that the truth comes out in this way."

"I am sure," the judge interposed, "that no one can blame you for your part in the case."

For the first time the emotion within him showed in Dr. Millard's voice as he said, "Whether they blame me is not important. It is the injury to the faith that matters. To the millions of good men and women in whom bitterness and cynicism will grow when they hear the truth about John Nobody." He paused, and shook his head. "I have seen much wickedness in my life, but this is the wickedest thing of all. Durgeon, at least, fought religion frankly and openly. Atheist though he was, he spoke out like a man. The evil he did to men's souls was nothing compared to the evil his murderer has done by practicing upon the desire of men to believe."

In the prisoner's box there was sudden tumult, as Ambrose Cullen, alias John Nobody, leaped to his feet and screamed, "Shut up, you meddling old fool! Shut up!" As a guard forced him back, his waxlike face became suffused with blood, and he rattled off a string of obscenities that put the courtroom in an uproar before the guard could silence him with a heavy hand upon his mouth.

Dr. Millard rose, and long-suppressed anger had its way with him. He stood tall, erect, and formidable, and his eyes blazed with forgotten fire. At that instant all compassion was gone out of him; he wanted to hurt and to frighten the impious man opposite him. He stretched out his long arm and pointed an accusing finger at the prisoner; his voice took on sonorous depths, quieting the noisy courtroom; and he spoke old, prophetic words which sounded like the clanging of great bells: "'Behold, the whirlwind of the Lord goeth forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind: it shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked'."

He stood there for an instant, full of wrath. Then, with an effort, he mastered himself and stepped down from the witness stand. As he did so, excited voices rose in the neighborhood of the prisoner's box.

"What's the matter with him?" someone cried.

A guard answered, "Looks like he's passed out."

A woman cried, "He's dead!" And another: "John Nobody is dead!"

Above the torrent of sound, defying the judge's gavel, a voice screamed "— died when he pointed his finger!" Someone else shouted, "It's a *real*

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miracle, this time!" "He put the curse of God on him!"

"No!" answered Dr. Millard, suddenly and loudly. "No! The man had a bad heart!"

No one listened to his words. Men were staring at him with awe. Several women openly began to pray. One of them burst through the guards, fell on her knees before him, and had to be bodily lifted and dragged away.

Dr. Millard stood completely still before the witness stand. Some who observed him thought he was filled with sublime exaltation. It was not so. Within him was a sense of terror, of painful humility, and of ignorance. He felt unsure, and weary. He did not raise his eyes, but presently his lips moved a little, as out of his remembered store of prayer there came to him a saying that struck him as appropriate to his need:

"Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart," he murmured earnestly, "to judge Thy people, that I may distinguish between good and evil."

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*Mr. Carr wrote to your Editors that he found the seed of his story, "The Trial of John Nobody," in a newspaper item which he read in the early 1930s. It described a lecture given by Sinclair Lewis somewhere in the midwest. Mr. Carr recollects that in his lecture, to emphasize his belief in a dramatic way, Sinclair Lewis made use of a common emotional expression: he invited the Lord to strike him dead if he was wrong.*

*Mr. Carr began wondering what would have happened if the challenger* had *dropped dead on the spot. But Mr. Carr only wondered — it was merely an interesting and stimulating speculation: the subsequent process of incubation proved very slow indeed. Fifteen years passed. True, there were a few times during the fifteen years when the idea popped back into his mind — rather, thrust its head above the surface of his mind; but nothing happened. And yet, without Mr. Carr's realizing it, the creative function was at work — slowly, patiently, but inexorably.*

*Then EQMM purchased Mr. Carr's story, "The Man Who Played Hunches," and, to quote the author, "my thoughts started to roam once again into detective channels." Another idea floated up from the deep pool of Mr. Carr's subconscious — the character of Dr. Millard. Actually, the conception of Dr. Millard had its origin in an entirely different type of story — a tale of the conflict between faith and fact. But one day the two elements — the lecture situation and the character of Dr. Millard — coalesced, and Mr. Carr began to scribble.*

*It is always thus: the creative mind is the true Philosopher's Stone, the author is the true alchemist. Mind and man make a miracle, transmuting the intangible into the tangible . . .*

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